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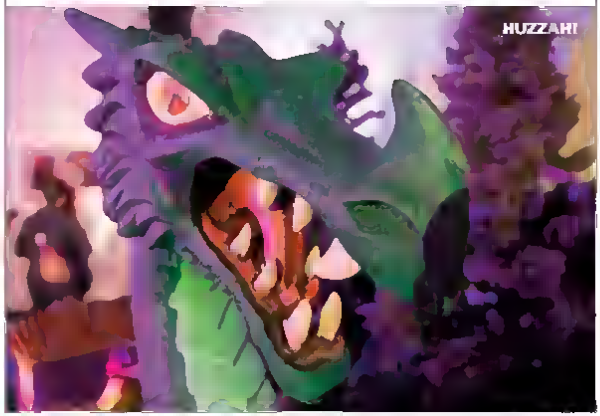
DUNGEONS & DRAGONS: THE AUCTION OF MANY THINGS



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on the cover

Illustration by Felipe Flores
Design by Michael Ziobrowski

ORANGE FEATHERS »

FELIPE FLORES

OC WEEKLY

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"Gettin desperate eh?" —mad_greek_metalworks
"Gross. Unfollow." —tigertankofficial both responding to an ad for a personal-injury law firm that ran on Instagram and depicted an aggressive dog about to possibly bite a hand

kook_skywalker responds: All the babies on here with their unfollowing comments— You assholes get to read this amazing rag for free every fucking week, and now you're going to cry because they posted an ad? You think the people who work there do their jobs pro bono?! Your precious Instagram (that thing you're using right now) wouldn't even exist without ads So delete your accounts and go flagellate yourselves

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Prosecutorial Betrayal?

OC mass-murder-case victim helped Todd Spitzer become DA and now feels used

During Orange County's infamous jailhouse-informant scandal, Todd Spitzer—a county supervisor eyeing the top prosecutor job—occasionally visited the courthouse when District Attorney Tony Rackauckas held press conferences. A natty, decades-younger Spitzer would stand behind the gaggle of print, radio and television reporters and watch an aging Rackauckas mumble semi-coherent answers or outright lies to questions. The supervisor's presence unnerved the DA, who couldn't compete with him rhetorically. Instead, he shot dead-eye expressions at his lurking, fellow Republican nemesis.

At one of these events in 2015, Bethany Webb, who'd lost her sister Laura in Orange County's worse mass shooting, displayed disgust that Rackauckas defended once-secret law-enforcement corruption in hopes of securing the death penalty for the shooter. Those tainted government actions, which we've previously outlined, stalled the case for years and only prolonged trauma for Webb and other victims who wanted their criminal-justice-system nightmare over. But she was also not happy with Spitzer's appearance.

moxley CONFIDENTIAL

»R. SCOTT MOXLEY

"What is *he* doing here?" Webb asked Paul Wilson in what sounded more like a statement than a question. Wilson, who'd lost his wife Christy in the same 2011 mass shooting, smiled awkwardly and shrugged his shoulders. At the time, he and Spitzer, who had spent years promoting himself as one of California's leading victims'-rights advocates, were in the midst of forming a bond. He believed Spitzer sincerely felt Rackauckas had botched the case, though others disagreed.

"Most of the families [of the victims] hated Todd," Wilson recently recalled. "They thought he was only around for the politics and said he was a bozo. I genuinely liked the guy. I thought if I helped put him in place at the DA's office, he would right the wrongs."

But the relationship has unraveled in anger for Wilson and frustration for Spitzer. There's no mystery about the timing. It was in the wake of Spitzer's impressive underdog November victory over Rackauckas, who'd been in office for two decades. Or the cause of their friction. Lingering issues from the government's informant cheating as well as Wilson's view he was used, then backstabbed by the incoming DA.

"He just became a different guy after he won," said Wilson.

The rift underscores how swiftly relationships change in politics. Until the election, Wilson was a significant face and voice of Spitzer's campaign. The two often chatted on the phone and attended events together. The challenger even convinced Wilson to use his weighty status in the victims'-rights community to do an anti-Rackauckas television commercial months before the election. Then, on the eve of the contest, Spitzer asked him to record a mass-produced robo-call ad.

"My name is Paul Wilson, and my wife and seven others were murdered in cold blood at the Seal Beach salon massacre here in Orange County," Wilson read from a script written by the campaign. "The current DA, Tony Rackauckas, told me to my face that he would have my back during the trial. Instead, he cheated on the case and got caught. The judge kicked him off the case. Rackauckas betrayed us, and he is a complete failure in every regard. Crime is off the charts. We are not safe. We must elect Todd Spitzer as our new and vibrant DA. Todd Spitzer is a tireless victims'-rights advocate and has handled thousands of criminal cases as a veteran prosecutor. … Join me in fighting to restore justice in Orange County. I'm urging you to vote for Todd Spitzer on Nov. 6."

At an election-night rally, Spitzer invited Wilson onto the stage. "He's been through so much," Wilson remembered Spitzer saying.

Within weeks of the election, however, Spitzer made a series of moves that alarmed his buddy. He kept longtime Rackauckas loyalist Ebrahim Baytieh—a prosecutor who helped aggressively run taxpayer-funded publicity downplaying informant-scandal cheating—in a top management position.

"I know the protection that guy gave Tony," Wilson explained. "Baytieh stood side by side with him. He delivered a more articulate version of Susan Kang Schroeder's usual nonsense media spin. Keeping him in the new administration was a bad choice." (Schroeder served as Rackauckas' reality-adverse, hot-headed media flack.)

Tensions grew worse when word leaked that Spitzer was also protecting Dan Wagner, who'd worked as the lead prosecutor of Scott Dekraai, the killer in the salon massacre. For several years, Wilson believed every word out of Wagner's mouth, especially that he cared about the victims' families. But over time, he became convinced the prosecutor was remorseless about his role in the informant scandal. Wagner had even self-demoted as head of the homicide unit into a lower-ranking post with greater civil-service protections from firing if Rackauckas lost. Spitzer then surprised everybody by promoting Wagner to run DA operations at North Court in Fullerton.

WILSON

BRYAN SHEEHY

"There's a major guy in the snitch scandal, and he's able to teach all of his bad habits to the young people in the office," Wilson said. "Wagner lied to us. He caused me and the families pain and suffering. Him getting promoted by Todd was a slap in the face. Remember, he told me that Wagner and the other DAs involved in the scandal were guilty and that it wouldn't have happened under his watch."

A chronic court watcher nowadays as he works to expose dirty law-enforcement officials, Wilson believes Spitzer is confirming Rackauckas' efforts to block public accountability for the snitch controversy. On numerous occasions since the new DA's swearing-in ceremony, Wilson has witnessed deputy DAs pretend the scandal (which wrecked at least 20 felony cases) didn't happen. He's also watched them work to keep embarrassing records secret from defense lawyers such as Scott Sanders, the assistant public defender who revealed the systemic snitch-related cheating after intensive investigations.

Unwilling to ignore what he sees as flip-flops, Wilson confronted Spitzer in text messages and phone calls. Emotional sentiments flew back and forth. He says the DA dismissed Rackauckas' snitch-scandal woes, and thus him, as a reason for his victory. "It got pretty bad," Wilson said. "I'm just blown away that he could so quickly turn on me. He told me that I needed to be more trusting of him now that he's in the politics game."

Those conversations heightened distrust. "There are more important things than politics, like making sure we have an honest criminal-justice system," Wilson said.

For his part, the DA feels saddened by the feud, believes he is truly an agent for reform, and says he's blocked from fully airing his side.

"I've spoken to Paul directly, but I'm not in a position to talk about anything at this time while I'm in the middle of the Department of Justice [DOJ] inquiry [into informant-scandal cheating]," Spitzer said. "So, you're just going to have to print whatever you have to print with a clear understanding that while this is pending, I'm not able to say anything."

In February, Spitzer—a former state assemblyman, school-board member and reserve Los Angeles cop—publicly complained about the DOJ probe. He said it was too time-consuming for his rookie administration, wanted federal officials to stop demanding access to records, and called on them to quickly issue findings before moving on elsewhere. That announcement caused Wilson to chuckle.

"He just doesn't want to give up any more documents because it's going to hurt," he said. "The funny thing is I still think Todd is better than Rackauckas. But I'm not fooling myself. It's business as usual inside that DA's office. There's no real sign of change. I thought this guy was a friend, and now I feel manipulated."

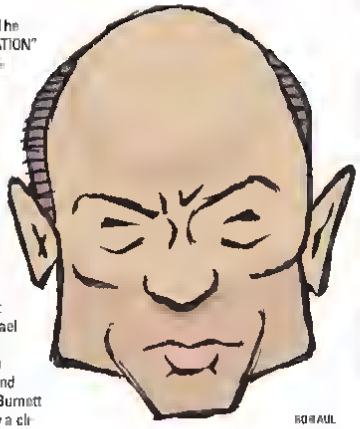
On March 25, fate put Spitzer, his entourage and Wilson in the same cramped Santa Ana courthouse elevator. The DA shook Wilson's hand, hugged him and tried small talk. But this victim—a life-long law-enforcement champion before seeing criminal-justice-system warts up close—wasn't in the mood for pleasantries. And he still has the same question. How can Spitzer employ prosecutorial scoundrels while declaring his agency cleansed?

RSCOTTMOXLEY@OCWEEKLY.COM

a clockwork orange»

(Don't) Be Like Mike

» MATT COKER



BOB AUL

Donald Trump's celebration of—how'd he tweet it? Oh, yeah—"Total EXONERATION" must've ballooned when he heard the latest about Newport Beach–based lawyer Michael Avenatti.

Having in the past represented the Ron Goldman family against O.J. Simpson, Super Bowl ticketholders against the NFL and a suicide victim's family against her ex-boyfriend Jim Carrey, 48-year-old Avenatti is likely best known for his reign of legal and PR terror against Trump.

It was hush-money payments to Avenatti's porn star client Stormy Daniels, who alleges she had a sexual tryst with Trump, that eventually led to Michael Cohen's riveting testimony to Congress last month. But Avenatti actually began sparring with Trump in 2006, when he and fellow *The Apprentice* producer Mark Burnett settled an idea-theft lawsuit brought by a client of the lawyer.

Since grabbing the spotlight with Daniels, Avenatti has propped himself up as a Democratic challenger in the 2020 presidential election (he later withdrew), produced an accuser against Trump Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh, and provided MSNBC with "secretly shot" video of a child separated from her mother while in the custody of immigration officials.

No. 29 on *OC Weekly*'s 2018 list of Orange County's Scariest People, Avenatti has also disgraced himself along the way. He was accused various times during bankruptcy proceedings last year of failing to make agreed-upon payments to creditors and a former law partner. He was arrested in November for suspected domestic violence against his girlfriend (prosecutors ultimately did not charge him). He was evicted a few days later from his Fashion Island office by the Irvine Co., which says he skipped on $213,000 in rent. He settled a case in December with his second ex-wife, who was owed hundreds of thousands of dollars in unpaid child support.

Avenatti announced Monday morning he would hold a press conference to "disclose a major high school/basketball scandal perpetrated by Nike," but hours later, he was charged by federal prosecutors in New York with trying to extort $25 million from the shoe maker. Federal prosecutors in California later that day accused him of defrauding a Mississippi bank and embezzling from clients to pay off personal debts and expenses.

He and Trump were made for each other.

MCOKER@OCWEEKLY.COM

HeyYou!

» ANONYMOUS

DoorBasher

BOB AUL

Why do I have to give a predetermined tip for a guy who fucked up my meal after I worked all day and want to relax and enjoy dinner, but now can't because the food is cold/the drink is wrong/there's missing items? It's completely unfair to those drivers who give 150 percent, the drivers who always bring me plates, napkins, salsa, a smile, thanks and even a promo card with a sucker attached as a gift. You making us tip prior to delivery is like me going to a salon with long hair to just get my split ends trimmed, tipping the girl $30 ahead of time and ending up with a military-style buzz cut. This is completely unfair to all the drivers who go out of the way to make my delivery experience awesome. I have no problem giving a driver a $5 or $10 tip for great service, but now I must tip even if the service is terrible? Please change back to the old way.

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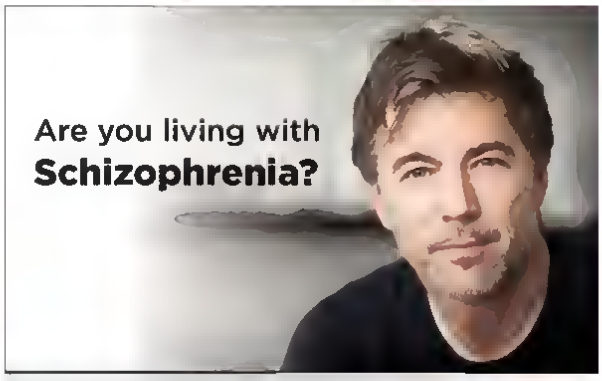
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DICE ARE HOW YOU FLEX

Welcome to *Dungeons & Dragons* in Orange County

By **Anthony Pignataro**

Photos By **Michael Ziobrowski**

"So what would you guys like to do?"

The question hung over the table for a few moments. Break into more safes? Explore another mineshaft? Head deeper underground in hopes of finding more treasure? Or just haul ass back to the surface? One person at the table worried aloud about running into "rock people."

"You haven't seen any rock people," says Jeremy Samson, who's sitting at the head of the table.

"We know they're there!" the person fires back.

Samson sighs. "You found a logbook stating there were rock people 300 years ago," he told them in the tone of a high-school teacher trying to get his students back on track with the day's lesson. "You have no other evidence that they're there!"

"We have rocks!" another person blurts out.

Welcome to the twice-monthly *Dungeons & Dragons* game at the Anaheim Brewery. Though considered ancient by game standards (the first edition of *D&D*, as it's colloquially known, came out in the early 1970s), the game is experiencing a kind of renaissance. Once the domain of nerdy teenage boys (I know because I was one of them), *D&D* now appeals to a far more diverse audience—many of whom weren't even alive when the game first appeared. Also worth noting: Three of the seven players at Samson's Anaheim Brewery game were women.

The New Yorker has written about the game. It's been played on *Big Bang Theory*. Basketball player Tim Duncan, actor Vin Diesel, writer Ta-Nehisi Coates and adult movie star Sasha Grey are reportedly dedicated players. *Critical Role*, a web series on Twitch during which voice actors such as Marisha Ray, her husband, Matt Mercer, and their friends play *D&D* is so popular that its fans recently pledged $6 million in just four days on Kickstarter to fund a new animated series, *The Legend of Vox Machina*.

"A very small percentage of our audience tunes in to see how the game works," Ray says. "But the majority, I think, loves seeing the interactions between the players. This was our home game for about two years before we brought it to the public eye. Now, the audience is kind of like the 10th member of the table. Our fans will tell us, 'I feel like we know you.'"

There even might be, possibly, a *D&D* movie. Maybe. Joe Manganiello—who appeared in TV shows and movies such as *True Blood*, *Rampage* and the recent *D&D* episode of *Big Bang Theory*—works as a consultant for Wizards of the Coast, which owns *D&D*. A longtime fan of the game, he pitched a movie a few years ago based on one of the many fantasy novels written in the *D&D* universe. Though that didn't happen, it's still possible some studio will put it on the big screen.

"It was the foundation of my creativity when I was growing up," Manganiello says. "I'm more obsessed about it than anything else in my life. My group is predominantly sports athletes. We behave like we're on a team. We grew up doing this. We really love getting together, telling stories. It's our own weekly *Game of Thrones*."

D&D is a role-playing adventure game. It's entirely analog—nothing mechanized, computerized or online. It doesn't even have a board. The only devices needed to play are paper, pencils, dice (it uses a lot of dice, ranging in size from four sides to 20), and the game's voluminous rules, lore and stat tables (miniature figurines, often painted in exacting detail, aren't required, but they can help players get a better grasp of what's going on with their characters).

Dating back to 1974, *D&D* was developed by Gary Gygax (a legend in the fantasy gaming world who died in 2008) and Dave Arneson for the company Tactical Studies Rules (TSR). After TSR went bankrupt in 1997, Wizards of the Coast, which also makes the popular fantasy card game *Magic: The Gathering*, bought *D&D*.

The game takes place in a magical, Medieval setting and borrows heavily from J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* (early on, a lawsuit threat from Tolkien Enterprises even forced TSR to change many names in the game). A player starts by creating a character on a "character sheet." The character has a name, species (dwarf, elf, human, etc.), class (fighter, cleric, rogue, etc.) and backstory. The more details the player can fill in on the character's life, the better. The player then rolls a series of dice to determine the character's skills, strengths and weaknesses. When finished, a group of players (three to seven is usually the best range) will team up with a "Dungeon Master" (DM), who will guide the players through a campaign, depending on how often you play, that can last from a few hours to a few years.

Action—usually in the form of swords and sorcery combat—is determined by both creativity and random chance. Players must plan ahead and think on their feet. Everything they do contributes to experience points (XP), which allow them to level their characters, which unlocks all sorts of new abilities, spells and other in-game goodies. Good Dungeon Masters are a mix of ancient bard and modern game-show host—theatrical, charismatic and dedicated enough to spend hours each week designing quests for their players.

"Video games are great, but they take away from the creative process because everything is given to you onscreen," Samson says. "In *D&D*, the only restraints are on what the Dungeon Master is willing to allow."

For Ray, the appeal of the game is much more basic. "I think people still need genuine human contact," she says. "I have a crazy theory that the further we get into social media, the more we need face-to-face interaction. We're wanting to go back to our roots and sit around the table and play games. Nothing will replace sitting around a table, making dumb jokes with your friends."

Search Meetup.com for *D&D* and other role-playing games (RPGs) in Orange County, and you'll find more than a dozen groups. And that's just private games; comic-book stores and hobby shops such as the Game Chest in the Irvine Spectrum and Brookhurst Hobbies in Garden Grove also feature special *D&D* nights. One of the most popular of these takes place every Wednesday at Comic Quest in Lake Forest.

The store has been around for 37 years, which is nearly as old as *D&D* itself; it's filled with comic books, toys, games and figurines. On major holidays, special collectible dice are handed out to customers for free. Among the décor are life-size statues of Wonder Woman and Harley Quinn, as well as a dry-erase board on which staff write each week's special question. On Feb. 6, the first night I show up to observe *D&D*, it displays the previous week's question ("Which 2019 would you pick?") and the following results:

- *Blade Runner*: 38 percent
- IRL (now): 30 percent
- *Akira*: 19 percent
- *Running Man*: 13 percent

"There are no terrible retail stories here," says Yvonne Gonzales, who manages Comic Quest's *D&D* night. "People come in happy."

The night is especially electric because an astonishing 80 people showed up the previous week (practically everyone I spoke to at Comic Quest wanted to tell me this). Though only about half that number of people show on Feb. 6, it's still more than enough people to possibly add a second *D&D* game night, Gonzales tells me.

Players and DMs are from all over South County. Comic Quest doesn't charge

them to play, but players usually buy all their gaming materials from the store. Brendan Balcewicz of Aliso Viejo arrives at Comic Quest around 5 p.m. to start setting up (games don't officially start until 7 p.m.). He's been a DM for five years or so. For every hour of gaming, he'll have already put in about a half-hour of planning.

Setting up next to Balcewicz is Christopher Rohhins of Trabuco Canyon. He's also a DM. Though each table is set up for about seven players, Rohhins once led a dozen players through a game. Both are heavy into the lore of *D&D* and are currently leading their players through an official module—an adventure that's already set up with a defined geography, monsters, combat and treasure. In fact, they're using the same module—Balcewicz's group is near the end, while Rohhins' is just starting out.

Balcewicz and Robhins say they see about one to four new players each week.

Shayna Nuzzo of Rancho Santa Margarita has only been playing *D&D* for a few weeks. "As a creative person, I really love being in an element that tests my boundaries," she says. "I love fantasy, immersing myself in a fantasy setting."

At one point during the night, a kid walks up to Gonzales and says he needs new dice because he feels "outclassed" at the table. Gonzales says this happens a lot, and she always walks them over to the store's dice display case, which is filled with many elaborate and colorful sets of dice and asks them, "Which one speaks to you?"

Dice are an incredibly important part of the game, providing what Manganiello calls the game's "craps table element." Dice can determine anything from how much damage a character takes from an attack to how much treasure is in a locked safe. During his Anaheim Brewery game, I watched Samson roll a die to determine the length of a mineshaft his players were exploring. Players can get superstitious, even fearful, of their dice (and all new players learn very quickly to never, ever touch another player's dice without permission).

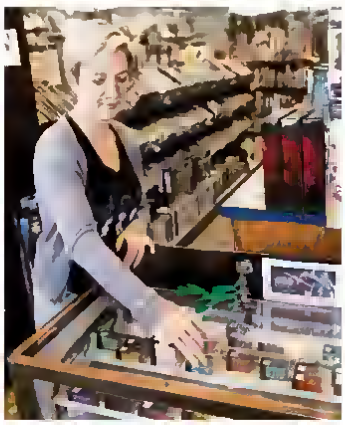
"Dice are gamer jewelry," Gonzales says. "Dice are how you flex."

Gonzales says Comic Quest occasionally holds a "Bad Dice Day," during which players are encouraged to bring in their unlucky dice. Gonzales says the dice are placed in a "Container of Shame," where they're subjected to hours of Nickelback music, then placed in a rock tumbler. Sometimes, they're later burned.

Watching everyone sit and play *D&D* brought back a host of memories for me. I played the game as a teen in the 1980s—the so-called "satanic era," when nervous parents and irresponsible media painted the game as some sort of dark evil. In fact, I remember one awkward conversation in which my dad wanted to make sure the game wasn't inspiring me to murder someone.

It was only while reporting this story that I realized how weird my style of play actually was. Because I only had one or two other friends who played, we would each create a bunch of characters. We'd trade off being DM, with the other player leading their band of characters on the quest. Our dungeons were what we now call "homebrew"—basically, made up using our own imaginations. I don't recall us ever using official *D&D* modules and adventures.

But I do remember emotions getting heated. One time, my friend who was acting as DM decided, for whatever reason, that one of my characters needed to die. So he led my group into a room and conjured up dangerous bugbears or maybe a green dragon. Within minutes, my wizard was dead. Then my friend took the actual wizard character sheet (which was just a sheet of notebook paper) and tore it up. That was the end of our playing *D&D* for some time.



IN THE BOWELS
ABOVE LEFT: DUNGEON MASTER JEREMY SAMSON DESCRIBES AN ENCOUNTER TO A TABLE OF PLAYERS AT ANAHEIM BREWERY.

DICEMASTER
ABOVE: YVONNE GONZALES PULLS SETS OF POLYHEDRAL DICE FOR CUSTOMERS AT COMIC QUEST IN LAKE FOREST.

THE AMBASSADOR, THE LEGEND & THE HEIR
LEFT: JOE MANGANIELLO, TIM KASK (FIRST EMPLOYEE/WRITER/EDITOR AT *TSR* AND *THE DRAGON*) AND LUKE GYGAX (SON OF *D&D* CREATOR GARY GYGAX).

According to Gonzales, about 20 percent of those who show up for Comic Quest's *D&D* Game Night are women. "It's our most balanced night," she says. And if you think 20 percent is a strange definition of "balanced," keep in mind that other game nights are about 5 percent women—at best.

The *D&D* game played now at places such as Comic Quest, Anaheim Brewery and Manganiello's wine cellar basement (seriously, go on YouTube and watch the video of this place—it's amazing) is very different from the one of my youth. Math and probability took precedence then over character creation, which in itself was embarrassingly sexist. Female characters had lower stats than corresponding male ones, and the old *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* handbook even included a "Harlot's Table," in which characters encountering a "harlot" had to roll dice to see if she was a "brazen strumpet" or an "aged madam."

Thankfully, all that's gone. In the game's fifth edition, which came out in 2014, there are no penalties for creating female characters. In fact, the new *Player's Handbook* specifically asks players to be creative when assigning their character a gender. "Think about how your character does or does not conform to the broader culture's expectations of sex, gender and sexual behavior," it states. "You don't need to be confined to binary notions of sex and gender. . . . You could also play a female character who presents herself as a man, a man who feels trapped in a female's body, or a bearded female dwarf who hates being mistaken for a male."

When asking people why so many more women were playing *D&D* today, I got a variety of answers. The fact that women such as Ray, Felicia Day and Satine Phoenix are playing and discussing the game on Twitch and YouTube helps a lot. "I tell women, 'Be brave; try it,'" Ray says. "And I tell men, 'Be open. The more diverse your game is, the better it will be.' This is why I love *Dungeons & Dragons* so much. It's like a life simulator, without real-life consequences. In this community, all are welcome. Let's end the era of gate-keeping nerdy boys."

But a big part of the reason dates back to 2014, when Wizards of the Coast reworked the game's rules. "[T]he fifth edition shifted the focus of the game so that it centered heavily on the storytelling aspect," Vivian Kane wrote in a May 10, 2018, essay on TheMarySue.com. "The minutiae of battle logistics, the specificity of miniatures and maps were no longer necessary for gameplay. Instead, the game embraced an open-world feel, where story rules. After all, so much of the game's timeless success is due to humans' innate love of storytelling. The fifth edition allowed that to flourish."

Of course, math is still a huge part of *D&D*—I lost track of the number of times I watched players roll dice, then look up at the ceiling while performing arithmetic in their head—but the key to the game is sitting around a table with other people and taking part in a whole story about characters created by those people.

"The best way to play is to kinda surrender to it," says Caleb Cleveland, a teacher at Laguna College of Art + Design and illustrator of the new children's books *A*B*Cs*

» CONTINUED ON PAGE 10

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DICE ARE HOW YOU FLEX

» FROM PAGE 9

of D&D and *1*2*3s of* D&D. "When you make a role-playing game that's about relationships, you automatically get a broader audience."

Santa Ana resident Madison Johnson is one of Cleveland's students who says he inspired her to start playing. "He saw my friends and I were really close-knit," she recounts. "So one day, he said, 'Why aren't you guys playing *D&D*?'"

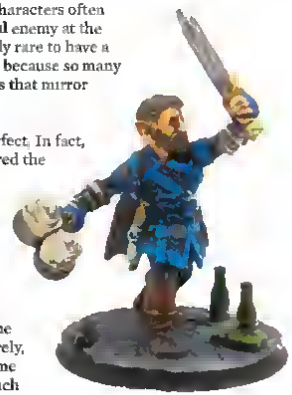
Today, she works at Comic Quest alongside Gonzales and plays *D&D* about once a week, though never at the store. Like Gonzales, she plays at home or at her friend's house. Her friends, who are also artists, will often draw the characters and situations that take place in their games. "I really like the character aspect," she says. "We work together to make the craziest story we can with our characters."

The way Johnson and Gonzales play is very different than, say, Balcewicz and Rohhins, who play very close to official *D&D* lore. By contrast, Johnson and Gonzales homebrew their questlines. To be clear, there's no wrong way to play—the key is finding a game that's comfortable to you.

"It's like writing a book, but way easier," says Gonzales, who was an English major in college.

Johnson describes her character as an "emo punk warlock" nicknamed "Mage against the Machine." One of Gonzales' characters is an Orc named Bloo. "That's short for Bloodmurdler, but he doesn't like that," Gonzales says. "And our characters are dating—I'm really proud of them." Gonzales is playing three characters right now—one guy, one girl, and one who's non-binary. Another friend of hers is playing a character that's a halfling and a gnome in a trenchcoat who are pretending to be one person. Often, Johnson and Gonzales say, they will conceal key details of their characters' personalities from everyone except the DM, who will try to engineer big reveal moments during their quests.

Gonzales says romance plays a huge part in her *D&D* adventures. In fact, she says, her friends' characters often end up romancing the "boss"—the powerful enemy at the end of virtually every *D&D* quest. "It's really rare to have a straight romance in *D&D*," she says. That's because so many players are LGBT, so they create characters that mirror their own experiences.



Now all this isn't to say that *D&D* is perfect. In fact, a number of players I spoke with shared the same criticism.

"It can be really intimidating when you start," says Gonzales. "The fifth edition rules are much more beginner-friendly, but the game can be hard to get into."

This has always been true of *D&D*, and it's doubtful it will ever change. The game requires players to be creative and patient, as well as do math. It needs them to imagine they're someone—or something—else entirely, in a foreign and fantastical setting. The game mechanics, which often include phrases such

as "Roll for initiative" and "Do a dexterity check" can be frightening to new players, unaccustomed to the practice of rolling dice and referring to stat tables to determine the outcome of a relatively simple move such as picking a lock.

Which is why Samson's game every two weeks at Anaheim Brewery is so welcoming. Usually, they play on benches outside, but when it's especially cold and rainy, the staff set up a special table for them inside the brew room.

Samson, who manages landscaping for the city of Anaheim, advertises the game on Facebook through his D20 Adventure Realm page. He charges players $10 each session, and in return, he provides them everything: character sheets, dice, trays, access to a library of *D&D* manuals and handbooks, miniatures, and as much assistance as they want to create their characters and play. He even has premade characters that people can play if they don't want to create one.

His choice to hold his game sessions at the brewery wasn't an accident. "It's easier to attract beginners to a brewery," he says. "It can be intimidating to go to a comic-book store. I ask that people should bring creativity and a thirst for craft beer. I have three or four players who are really consistent. But for the past six months, there's been at least one new person every time. I like that what I'm doing is attracting the brand-new player. I'm kind of honored by that."

In contrast to the DMs at Comic Quest, who set up little screens in front of their notes and modules (which I can remember doing as a kid when my friend and I played *D&D*), Samson simply had a bunch of typed notes in front of him outlining the dungeon his players were exploring. Whereas some DMs stand in front of their groups and gesticulate wildly while leading their players, Samson is chill, content to sit, almost like a college professor sitting in on a discussion session.

He's also considering experiments in breaking down the wall between *D&D* and reality. For example, he's considering the following deal with his players: If they get certified to perform CPR, he'll give their characters the "Medicine" skill. And though the night I saw it had women making up nearly half his players, Samson says his group usually isn't quite that diverse.

"Generally, we have one or two women in the group," he says. "Again, I think it's because of the setting. I generally have more women here than when I play at game shops."

The session I observed lasted about an hour and a half. It fit into the classic *D&D* adventure structure: initial exploration, a little lock-picking and thievery, some combat, and then the all-important looting. But I was amazed at how everyone at the table found a way to participate that brought out the uniqueness of their characters. Samson was also very generous doling out XP and treasure at the end—perhaps a little too generous, but that's because he's trying to convince the group to head deeper into the elaborate mine he's constructed for them. But other sessions aren't so clear-cut, and that's a good thing.

"We've had a couple of sessions where barely any dice were thrown," Samson says. "Those are my favorites. The players were mostly just interacting with townspeople, and it seemed everyone was okay with that. That's like the quintessential *D&D* experience, in my opinion. You can get combat in a lot of games. But people sitting around a table, role-playing these characters—that's so cool."

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PHOTO BY SIMONE HOGAN

fri/03/29

[CONCERT]

BIG TAKEOVER
HR (of Bad Brains)

Get ready to feel the walls rumble: Bad Brains' front man HR is coming to town! Though his solo work tends to favor his reggae side, the extensive list of supporting acts scheduled for this evening will surely touch upon all the styles the musician has done over the years. And for this occasion, the Doll Hut will host two stages: one for all ages, the other catering to those 21 and older. Expect a well-rounded evening of punk, funk, heavy metal, hip-hop and soul with Downtown Brown, Hoi Polloi: Southern California, Infirmities, Low Budget, H.B.H, Los Nautcals, Fever Dream and Not a Chance.

HR with Downtown Brown, Hoi Polloi and more at the Doll Hut, 107 S. Adams St., Anaheim, (562) 277-0075, www.worldfamousdollhut.com. 7 p.m. $10-$15. All ages. —SCOTT FEINBLATT

[BURLESQUE]

Hakuna Your Ta-Ta's
The Happiest Burlesque Show on Earth

The Disneyland crowds can be too much to bear, especially now that spring break season has arrived. But you can still enjoy a little Disney magic! Leave the kids at home tonight, as this fan-favorite event for the 21-and-older crowd pays tribute to the Happiest Place on Earth in burlesque-parody fashion. Two cocktails prepared in a cabaret-style setting await you in the world of sexy swashbuckling pirates and twerking boat skippers. This comedic, risque show is sure to have you both laughing and blushing as you relive all of your favorite childhood memories.

Dirty Little Secrets Presents: The Happiest Burlesque Show on Earth at Harvelle's Long Beach, 201 E. Broadway, Long Beach, www.longbeach.harvelles.com. 8:30 & 10:30 p.m. $10-$50. 21+. —MORGAN EDWARDS

sat/03/30

[CONVENTIONS]

GEEKS UNITED
WonderCon

You don't have to travel to San Diego to get your fill of book-sellers, cosplayers, seminars and panels of everything pertaining to comic books and beyond. Among the featured guests at this year's WonderCon in Anaheim are Sergio Aragonés (*Mad Magazine*), Jim Lee (*Justice League. Origin*), Greg Capullo (*Batman*), Scott Snyder (*Batman*) and Phil LaMarr (*MadTV, Futurama*). Plus, there is such an insanely large number of activities that the WonderCon website features an interactive section to help you create your own itinerary. Play games, get signatures, learn more about technology and upcoming programs—this event's everything a comic geek needs!

WonderCon at the Anaheim Convention Center, 800 W. Katella Ave., Anaheim, (714) 765-8950; www.comic-con.org. 11:30 a.m.; also Sat.-Sun. $12-$40. —SCOTT FEINBLATT

[FAMILY EVENTS]

A Family Favorite
Bubblefest XXIII

The bubble spectacular known as Bubblefest is back—just in time for spring break! Grab the kiddies and explore the wonderful world of any globules and blobs through interactive activities in the Mega Bubble Courtyard and participate in hands-on science in the fantastical Bubblefest Zone, where you'll find such interactive exhibits as Water Spheres, the Bubble Wall and the Bubble Art Studio. Come learn about surface tension, elasticity, air pressure and geometric properties. There's also a magical Mega Bubblefest Laser Show starring world-record-holders Demi and Melody Yang. Tickets sell out quickly, especially during the break, so get yours today!

Bubblefest XXIII at Discovery Cube Orange County, 2500 N. Main St., Santa Ana, (714) 542-2823, www.discoverycube.org. 10 a.m. Through April 21. $16.95-$19.95. —SR DAVIES

sun/03/31

[COMEDY]

Finger-Licking Humor

Somebody Feed Phil

Phil Rosenthal brings to the Irvine Improv a special screening of an episode of his show *Somebody Feed Phil*. The unscripted Netflix docu-series blends his signature quirky humor with his biggest passions: food and travel. The *Everybody Loves Raymond* creator is a 15-time Emmy winner, author and producer, but all that matters here is that he is gracing us with a one-night-only event at which New Orleans-inspired food and cocktails will be served. Come have some soul food with a heaping helping of belly laughs (and perhaps start planning your next trip).

Somebody Feed Phil at Irvine Improv, 527 Spectrum Center Dr., Irvine, (949) 854-5455, improv.com/irvine. 1 p.m. $75. —LILA SHAKTI

[CONCERT]

Wild Man

Mark Sultan

Mark Sultan is among the top 10 people who laid the groundwork for—and arguably invented—the current worldwide wave of garage rock, so it's nice to see the master back at work. Besides an unparalleled fluency in the original '60s form, he possesses rare and welcome personal intensity—soul, you could call it. In a genre full of screamers, shouters and stompers, Sultan can summon unfiltered emotion that's as startling and exhilarating as any vintage fuzz tone. His newest album, *Let Me Out*, is a rocker, but here's hoping he dips into his deep discography, too.

Mark Sultan with Schizophonics, Los Hurricanes and Vaguess at Alex's Bar, 2913 E. Anaheim St., Long Beach, (562) 434-8292, alexsbar.com. 2 p.m. $10. 21+. —CHRIS ZIEGLER

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mon/04/01

[CONCERT]

Time to Boogie

A Boogie Wit Da Hoodie

While he's made some solid guest appearances on numerous recording artists' tours—from Drake to Future—New York rapper A Boogie Wit Da Hoodie is poised to finally enjoy his time in the spotlight as a headlining act. His December release, *Hoodie SZN*, puts the artist's talents on full display with guest features from Juice Wrld and Offset. Neither Boogie's ferocious stage presence nor his songwriting style are anything to snuff at, and he'll immerse audiences in both at tonight's intimate stage performance.

A Boogie Wit Da Hoodie at House of Blues at Anaheim Gardenwalk, 400 Disney Way, Ste. 337, Anaheim, (714) 778-2583, www.houseofblues.com/anaheim. 8 p.m. $15. All ages. —AIMEE MURILLO

tue/04/02

[ART]

THE ALMOST APOCALYPSE

'Invocation of Almost: The Art of David Tibet'

In poet and visual artist David Tibet's "Invocation of Almost," old, new and previously unseen works showcase his psychedelic visions of the apocalypse through illustration, sculpture and the integration of ancient, mythical texts. Accompanying the exhibit is an exclusive new musical composition from his ongoing-since-the-'80s experimental-music project, "Current 93," which has paired elements of classical folk with industrial electronic sound collages to construct a dystopian aesthetic.

"Invocation of Almost: The Art of David Tibet" at the Nicholas & Lee Begovich Gallery, Cal State Fullerton, 800 N. State College, Fullerton, (657) 278-7760; www.fullerton.edu/arts/art/galleries/begovich_gallery. Noon. Through May 25. Free. —STEVE DONOFRIO

wed/04/03

[THEATER]

FAMILY TIES
Poor Yella Rednecks

Playwright Qui Nguyen's new *Poor Yella Rednecks* premieres at South Coast Repertory this week. There's a lot going on here: Qui tells an intricately personal tale about his parents (who met in an Arkansas refugee camp after the fall of Saigon, which was portrayed in Qui's previous work, *Vietgone*) trying to navigate life in 1975 as a family in a foreign country. And it gets messy. There's also some '90s-esque rapping and a bit of puppeteering. But all entertaining gimmicks aside, what lies at the heart of *Poor Yella Rednecks* is some truly honest, brave storytelling.

Poor Yella Rednecks at South Coast Repertory, 650 Town Center Dr., Costa Mesa, (714) 708-5555, www.scr.org. 7:30 p.m. Through April 27. $20-$52.
—ERIN DEWITT

[COMEDY]

Ready? Set? Wing It!
Orange County Improv Festival

The Orange County Improv Festival returns for its annual comedy-filled, four-night event. Submissions to be part of the action and a team are no longer available, but you can watch and learn how to improve your improv skills. There will also be workshops hosted by skillful teachers such as Betsaida LeBron, who has more than 12 years of experience yukking it up onstage with various improv troupes and can show you how to act with more confidence. Some of the shows on the lineup include "Hogwash. Harry Potter Improv," "Lumberjack Baristas" and "The Sound of Musical." Come laugh along!

Orange County Improv Festival at STAGEStheatre, 400 E. Commonwealth Ave., Fullerton, ocimprovfest.com. 7 p.m. Through April 6. $15-$40.
—LAUREN GALVAN

thu/04/04

[BENEFITS]

Hair Today, Gone Tomorrow
Clean Shave

Any hairy fellas out there wanna make a difference in thousands of kids' lives? Moustaches 4 Kids holds its Second Annual Clean Shave event today at District Lounge, where fluffy-lipped men can get their voluminous mouth brows removed via electric razor for a good cause. Sign up to be an official grower online, then show up at the check-in area the day of the event. The non-'stached crowd can witness this group shave and cheer on dudes losing their double hamsters to raise money for CHOC Children's Foundation. And if you're not packing whiskers but want to help out, you can either sign up to be a grower for next year or donate to an already-registered grower. Beards, goatees and sideburns need not apply—it's sexy 'staches all the way!

Second Annual Clean Shave at District Lounge, 223 W. Chapman Ave., Orange, (714) 639-7777, moustaches4kids.com. 6 p.m. Registration online only.
—AIMEE MURILLO

[FOOD & DRINK]

BOYSENBERRY'S BACK IN TOWN
Boysenberry Festival

Besides the calendar spinning past April Fool's Day, another sure sign that spring is finally here is the annual Boysenberry Festival at Knott's Berry Farm. This year's expanded event will feature more than 75 creations crafted by the Knott's culinary team and inspired by the berry. Walter Knott cultivated and named for its creator, Rudolph Boysen. Among the offerings—believe it or not—will be jerk chicken wings, jambalaya and hummus. The all-ages event will also feature live bluegrass music, the *Peanuts* squad and a petting zoo. If that's not going to get fannies through the turnstiles, perhaps nothing will.

Boysenberry Festival at Knott's Berry Farm, 8039 Beach Blvd., Buena Park, (714) 220-5200. www.knotts.com. 10 a.m. Through April 28. $46.
—WYOMING REYNOLDS

MORGAN EDWARDS

Birria All You Can Be

Discover the delectable treat hidden inside this Santa Ana candy store

BY EDWIN GOEI

Not far from the bustle of downtown Santa Ana exists Dulceria El Caracol. And hidden inside that candy shop, there's a restaurant called La Super Birria. Though you can browse Dulceria El Caracol's store aisles to grab a few Mexican sweets, party supplies and a piñata, it's the birria business that's slowly and inevitably taking over the real estate. The plastic picnic tables set up in rows by the owner now take up more than half of the shop's floor space.

Since I first wrote about it last December, and as word has spread, the birria has become the main attraction here—not in spite of the tucked-away location and lack of signage, but because of it. You walk into the place feeling as though you've found El Dorado in the jungle. The treasure at La Super Birria is the birria itself. The dish is the kind of home-style bowl of food that an *abuelita* in a housedress would make on Easter Sunday.

This is verified when you see that La Super Birria is staffed almost exclusively by middle-aged women, undoubtedly with a few grandmothers among them. Though few speak English, if it looks as though you're going to be sharing your meal, one of them will offer an extra empty bowl. And if you ask for a box for the leftovers, she'll take the food and pack it for you—because, well, that's just what a grandma would do.

The rest of the time, these ladies are busy making everything from scratch, even the tortillas. Stationed next to the cash register, one woman flattens balls of masa into disks under the pressure of a hand-pressed vice, one after the other. She then plops them down onto a hot griddle. It only takes a minute for the tortillas to puff up like whoopee cushions.

As soon as they're ready, she stacks the hot, steaming tortillas in a lidded container, which is brought out with your bowl of birria. You could conceivably take a piece of meat and tuck it inside the fold, or just dip the tortilla into the brick-red soup. Either way, you're eating one of the thickest, best examples of tortillas in Santa Ana—perhaps better than the one that forms the base of Alebrije's tacos acorazados a couple of blocks down.

Soft but also chewy, light but also hearty, these tortillas possess such a pure corn flavor that they make you think of summer in the countryside. And as oyster crackers are to clam chowder, they're the perfect foil and accompaniment to the spicy, beefy nectar of the birria de res—a stew with meat so tender it verges on collapse. Words are insufficient to describe how soft the meat is. And where the beef isn't falling apart, there are just enough bits of fat left behind that it makes you shudder with delight when you encounter one.

If you don't want to commit to a full bowl of birria, you can sample just the broth, which is labeled on the menu as consomé. Spicy from roasted-chile paste and lip-smacking from the beef juices, the soup, which comes in a Styrofoam cup, is an entirely different creature than the one I had at Anaheim's Mr. Taco Nice a few months ago. That version had a half-inch of grease floating on top. By comparison, La Super Birria's version is practically health food, with nary a drop of grease. I'm not sure if this is indicative of birrias from Sahuayo, Michoacan, where owner Edgar Navarrete's family is from, but if it is, I think I prefer this style to any other.

When you do order the birria, in addition to the homemade tortillas, you're given a tray of condiments that include diced red onions, cilantro, lime and a homemade salsa that can set your head ablaze. Although it might seem as though you're gilding the lily, you want to add some of the onions and cilantro to brighten and elevate the dish even further.

There's a wonderful queso-birria that can be ordered à la carte or part of a so-called "Birria Tour," for which it's paired with a red taco, a taco dorado and a cup of consomé. The red taco and taco dorado are nearly indistinguishable, but the queso-birria is a different beast. Not only is it filled with a great deal more of the birria meat than the other two, but it also stretches decadently with cheese. And when you eat this giant thing, sinking your teeth into the pillow-sized half-moon made from the same homemade tortillas you saw earlier, you feel small as well as giddy—like a kid in a candy store that also happens to produce the best birria in OC.

LA SUPER BIRRIA
1041 W. First St., Santa Ana, (657) 245-3818. Open daily, 8 a.m.-8 p.m. Birria, $10.89; queso-birria, $4; tacos, $2.25-$2.99. No alcohol.

WHAT THE ALE
» GREG NAGEL

Abiding in Anaheim?

Most brewery openings in Anaheim don't shock me. But when I saw an alcohol permit in the window of an empty business down the street from my house, I logged into our local online neighborhood group. "The Dudes' Brewing Co. is opening by Anaheim Ice."

Just like that, a firestorm of comedy ensued. "I feel like my property values just dropped," noted one neighbor.

"There goes the neighborhood," said another with a barfing emoji.

"Don't they sell that at the 99 Cent store?" asked another.

Honestly, I've never had a beer by the Torrance-based brewery, probably for the same reason I don't buy Nickelback albums. The word of mouth is so bad it's meme-worthy. So when I set out in search of the company's beer in order to give it an actual review, I soon discovered why the Dudes' want to open a taproom. I hit Vons, the 99 Cent Store, Albertsons and three small liquor stores before finally finding a four-pack across from the Tropic Motel (free HBO!) on Harbor and Vermont, down the street from Disneyland. As I plonked my sought-after brew on the counter, the clerk snarkily asked, "Have you had that before?" (As it turns out, there is already a tasting room in Huntington Beach, but I was already on a mission.)

Once home, I cracked Grandma's Pecan, an English-style brown, into a proper imperial, nonic glass, fully prepared to witness an underdog story. Sadly, the beer opens up like a nut-and-cheese plate with a little kick of Parmesan that lingers. When it's cold, there's this weird note of fake maple extract that's way overboard, as well as a strange grittiness to the mouthfeel. Did I just get teabagged by the Dudes'? Are all its beers like this? I guess I'll find out when the taproom at 405 W. Center Promenade opens.

LETTERS@OCWEEKLY.COM

ERIN DEWITT

Come Hungry

Taboon Mediterranean makes sure its patrons are fed

In late February, the restaurant previously known as the Mirage Mediterranean Grill, a popular Bixby Knolls spot in operation for more than a decade, quietly morphed into something just a little different: Taboon Mediterranean.

Everything has been elevated. The menu boasts the same traditional dishes, but it's been tidied up and rounded out to a more cohesive offering. The dining room's exposed beams stayed, but the rest of the large space has been brightened up; what was once eclectic and maybe even a little cluttered is now bright, airy and minimalist.

Taboon makes sure its patrons are fed. Most appetizers cost less than $10, but are large enough to pass off as entrees, and the majority of actual entrees are definitely large enough to share and cost $15 and less.

For the zahrah hot appetizer, a serving platter is loaded with large florets of just-fried cauliflower, amply seasoned with garlic and rust-colored sumac, then tossed in a bright, citrusy dressing and finished with a drizzle of creamy tahini. The dish is about half a head or so—never before has anyone needed a warning not to spoil their dinner by eating too much cauliflower.

Often overshadowed by that other spread, hummus, a good baba ghanoush is hard to come by. Taboon's baba ghanoush mutabbal hits the mark, though, its smooth texture is dotted with pieces of chargrilled eggplant, and the garlicky taste is anchored by an underlying nutty tahini.

All the standard Mediterranean entrées are here: kebabs of roasted chicken, beef, lamb or kefta; lamb chops; falafel; even a whole grilled red snapper. Taboon also does a whole or half bone-in grilled chicken, if you want to pick apart your protein yourself.

LONG BEACH LUNCH

» ERIN DEWITT

Arguably one of the most steadfast indicators of a good Mediterranean or Middle Eastern restaurant (according to me!) is the shawarma, and Taboon's chicken shawarma is superb. Perfectly cooked, tender chicken comes thinly sliced and colored a deep yellow from marinating in half a dozen different spices. The flavor is concentrated, just a notch below overpowering; balance it out with a forkful of rice and a smear of the accompanying crisp, white toum, an addictive Lebanese raw-garlic sauce.

Each entrée comes with an assortment of sides, including warm pita triangles, a small mountain of savory seasoned rice, plus a choice of any cold appetizer. I went with the stuffed grape leaves, in which tiny capsules of rice are doused in a green-tinted olive oil.

The service is on point, with dishes coming out fast—almost too fast, as you can barely finish one course before the next is presented, steaming hot, to your table. If you still have room after dinner, Taboon offers baklava, rice pudding and Ashta ice cream in flavors such as rose water, pistachio or almond.

If there's just one caveat here, it's that Taboon does not serve any alcohol. It's not necessarily a hindrance, but in place of an ice-cold beer, I suggest you try the mango juice or Jallab, a sweet fruit drink made from rose water, grape molasses and dates.

TABOON MEDITERRANEAN
539 E. Bixby Rd., Long Beach, (562) 424-4774.

8 BEERS ON TAP! BIG SCREENS. 9 TV'S.
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SANTA ANA, CA

GREG NAGEL

Havin' a Shell of a Time

Taking a mini vacation at Ways & Means Oyster House

If you happen to find your refrigerator empty on one of our famous drinking holidays, make sure to preclude your food-going adventure with some thoughts and prayers sprinkled with good vibes and a cherry on top. With St. Patrick's Day being on the first 80-degree weekend since winter, I exclaimed, "Let's go to Huntington Beach!" The kid yelled, "OYSTERS!" And I was all, "Yay."

We headed to Pacific City, Huntington Beach's outdoor restaurants-and-shops collective, for some proper seafood with an ocean view. The problem is the rest of the world had the same idea that day. Normally, a trip to Ways & Means Oyster House is as easy as an ocean breeze, but on St. Paddy's Day, it was about as hard as getting an invite to a speakeasy inside an escape room.

With one cheek to the ocean and the other to the bar, we sat down to a dozen oysters and some cocktails. There was also epic HB people-watching, as various train wrecks, supermodels and surfer bros flip-flopped from bar to bar in silly hats, sometimes stopping for a selfie with the sea in the background.

Feeling as if we were on a mini-vacation, I ordered a Vacation cocktail, which reminds me of the Tahitian word for excellence, *maita'i*, as well as the classic cocktail called mai tai. It's shaken with one of my go-to rums, Papa's Pilar Blonde, which is sort of inspired by Ernest Hemmingway's ocean travels, and topped with Ways & Means' custom, barrel-refreshed Papa's Pilar 24 year, which adds a nice exclamation point to the drink.

Eat & Drink This Now

» GREG NAGEL

Most of Ways & Mean's cocktails are on the light, fruity and shaken side of things, which, like the rest of the place, is built around oyster consumption. Small plates dominate the rest of the food menu.

I'm not the kind of person who prefers lobster dunked in a bucket of butter akin to a county-fair dunk tank. I tend to like more simplistic preparations for the crustacean, with it fitting into a fresh corn tortilla alongside cabbage or shoved into a roll with aioli.

One menu classic that holds up is the jerk-seared salmon bowl, for which a surfwax-sized hunk of sustainable salmon is plunked on a bed of really good coconut rice, then topped with sweet papaya salad. The ruh gives balance to all that sweetness, offering a gentle kick of heat and smoke to the whole bite.

If you're not into oysters in their birthday suit, you can order them dressed in a few stylish outfits: the muumuu (chorizo and hollandaise), Madras (grilled with garlic, butter, Parmesan, parsley and bread crumbs), or even the hip sunset shooter (mango, tequila, lime, Tabasco and cocktail sauce), among others. I went with Chiapas, which is sort of like an oyster draped in a festive ceviche serape.

I think I'll plan my next visit for Cinco de Mayo.

WAYS & MEANS OYSTER HOUSE
21010 Pacific Coast Hwy., Huntington Beach, (714) 960-4300; wmoysters.com

COURTESY TOP KNOT FILMS

Friends of B.

Abducted in Plain Sight . . . with mouths agape

BY MATT COKER

It's weird how we sometimes get to the content that really captivates us. When I was a very young record collector, I practically wore out Stephen Stills' self-titled solo album. The back cover had a line mentioning the record was dedicated to Jimi Hendrix, who had died two months before *Stephen Stills* was released in November 1970. "Hey, if this Jimi Hendrix fellow is good enough for Stephen Stills," I reasoned, "he's good enough for me."

So I obtained a copy of *Smash Hits*, and long before my first experience with psychedelics, it was as if someone split open my head, rearranged my mind and closed it back up. I went on to seek every Hendrix album I could find, and needless to say, my collection wound up with way more Jimi than Stevie.

I thought back to this as the end credits rolled on my big screen to Skye Borgman's true-crime documentary *Abducted in Plain Sight*, which first came out in 2017 as *Forever "B"* and, with that title, won the 2018 Best Documentary jury award from the Newport Beach Film Festival, although I missed it there. Unfortunately.

It's only been in the past two months that *Abducted in Plain Sight* has been getting heavy buzz, thanks to its arrival early this year on the Netflix streaming platform. While listening to the March 15 *Dumb People Town* podcast, I heard co-host Daniel Van Kirk tell Randy and Jason Sklar and their guest Aaron Urist (comedians all) the following: "I tweeted out if you want to say the words 'this shit can't get any crazier' and be wrong, go watch *Abducted in Plain Sight*."

Immediately taking that challenge, I am here to report that, holy shit, Van Kirk nailed it. Around about the 20-minute mark of the flick, you see and hear what you believe must be the most bizarre detail of this story. Five minutes later, a new revelation trumps the last one, and five minutes after that, the same thing happens, and so on and so forth . . . all the way through the 91-minute run time.

The basic story starts like this: Florist Bob Broberg; his wife, Mary Ann, and their three daughters befriend a new family that moves into their Pocatello, Idaho, community in the early 1970s. They belong to the same Mormon church, and the charismatic dad, Robert Berchtold, whose nickname is "B," lights up any room he enters.

"B" takes a particular liking to the Brobergs' 12-year-old daughter, Jan, who comes to consider her neighbor "like a second father to me." Offering to pick Jan up from her piano lesson and take her horseback riding one day in October 1974, "B" at first seems late in bringing her home. A day passes, then two, then several before Mary Ann contacts the FBI to report her daughter and friend missing, although she does not suspect foul play. The Bureau has to inform her "B" kidnapped Jan. Heck, they had to tell both parents what a pedophile was.

Okay, before the kidnapping, your chin had already hit the floor over the budding relationship between "B" and Jan in plain sight, as the title goes, because 35 years later, we all recognize such predatory behavior. That the adult managed to worm himself into a position to snatch the girl, as well as that her parents are so nonchalant about it, leaves your mouth agape again. But keep in mind, we're still early in the story, folks.

If what transpires had been fiction, it would be beyond belief. There are the Brobergs' individual relationships with "B." There is Mrs. Berchtold's defense of "B." There are slaps on the wrist. There is a Mexican wedding. There are—I swear to freakin' God—ALIENS!

Having written many crime stories for the *Weekly* involving pedophiles who befriended families to get alone time with their children, I appreciated being able to see how it works in so much detail, as disturbing as that is. Like con men or resort salesmen or GOP presidential nominees, these smooth operators immediately recognize their mark's vulnerabilities, and under the guise of friendship or romance or an Electoral College victory, they prey on them to their own evil ends.

Abducted in Plain Sight is a fascinating study of human nature in this regard, although so many tons of excrement have landed on Bob and Mary Ann Broberg since the doc first streamed, the tweets went viral, and the Reddit community attacked that [spoiler alert!] the grown-up Jan came forward to reveal Borgman left out salient facts that put the parents and even Mrs. Berchtold in much better lights.

Even without knowing that, Jan and Mary Ann are portrayed in the end as heroes of the piece, and boy, do you need some by then.

MCOKER@OCWEEKLY.COM

ABDUCTED IN PLAIN SIGHT **was directed by Skye Borgman. Now streaming on Netflix.**

Fierce Warriors

BY MATT COKER

Us. In Jordan Peele's follow-up to his 2017 Oscar-winning *Get Out*, the writer/director/co-producer keeps it creepy as a family's serenity turns chaotic when doppelgängers drop by. *Various theaters; www.fandango.com. Daily through Thurs., April 4, visit website for show times and ticket prices, also at Art Theatre, arttheatrelongbeach.org. Thurs.-Thurs., March 28-April 4, visit website for show times. $9-$12.*

The Babadook. A widowed mother (Essie Davis), plagued by the violent death of her husband, does not believe her son (Noah Wiseman) when he rants about a monster in the house. Mom will learn. *The Frida Cinema, thefridacinema.org. Thurs., March 28, 2, 5:30, 8 & 10 p.m. $7-$10.*

Diana Ross: Her Life, Love and Legacy. Fathom Events beams into theaters just one part of the "Diamond Diana Celebration" marking the 75th birthday of Motown's legendary diva. *Various theaters; www.fathomevents.com. Thurs., March 28, 7 p.m. $13-$15.*

The Wedding Guest. Michael Winterbottom's new thriller follows a mysterious mercenary-for-hire (*Slumdog Millionaire*'s Dev Patel) from Britain to a wedding in Pakistan, where he snatches the bride-to-be (Radhika Apte). *The Frida Cinema, thefridacinema.org. Thurs., March 28, 10 p.m. $7-$10.*

The Beach Bum. It's a new irreverent stoner comedy that follows Moondog (Matthew McConaughey), a rebellious and lovable rogue who lives life large—in a story that only director Harmony Korine (*Spring Breakers*) can do justice. *Directors Cut Cinema at Regency Rancho Niguel, (949) 831-0446. Opens Fri., call theater for show times and ticket prices.*

Legend of the Demon Cat. During the Tang Dynasty, a Chinese poet and a Japanese monk join forces to investigate a demonic cat wreaking havoc on the imperial court. *The Frida Cinema, thefridacinema.org. Fri.-Sun., 1:30, 4:30 & 7:15 p.m. $7-$10.*

Bohemian Rhapsody. The formation, rise and fall of Queen. *The Source OC, thesourceoc.com. Fri., 7 p.m. Free.*

Senior Thesis Cycle 3 Film Screenings. These student-made films premiere, but not necessarily in this order: *Buttons the Great, Cold Cold Man,* and *Schrödinger.* Titles are subject to change, and the films are also live-streamed. *Chapman University; chapman.edu/dodge/. Fri., 7 p.m. Free.*

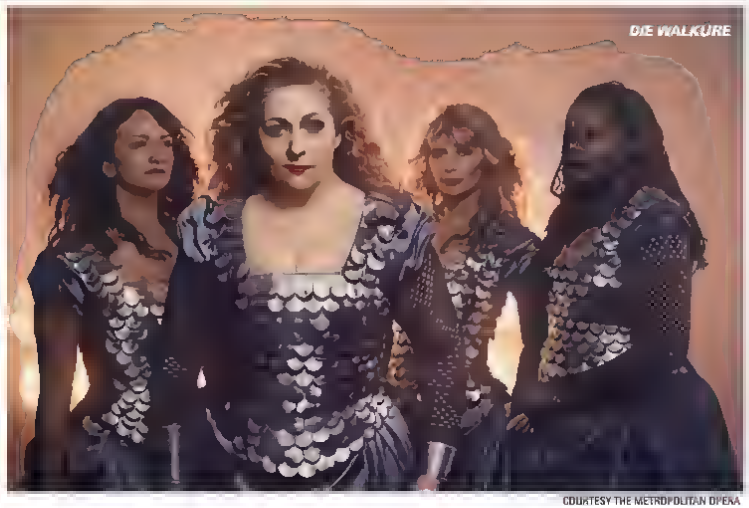
Graduate Thesis Cycle 3 & 4 Film Screenings. These films premiere, but not in this order: *Nest, One Meal, Skin Hunger,* and *Stuck.* Titles are subject to change, and the films are also live-streamed. *Chapman University; chapman.edu/dodge/. Sat., 7 p.m. Free.*

Enter the Void. A brother and sister (Nathaniel Brown and Paz de la Huerta) make a pact as children to stay together after their parents die. So when, as a grownup drug dealer, he dies, she is looked after by his ghost. *The Frida Cinema, thefridacinema.org. Fri.-Sat., 10 p.m. $7-$10.*

The Field Guide to Evil. An array of international filmmakers spin stories. *The Frida Cinema, thefridacinema.org. Fri., 10 p.m., Sat., 10:30 p.m., Sun.-Thurs., April 4, 10 p.m. $7-$10.*

The Met Live in HD: *Die Walküre.* Brünnhilde, Wotan's willful warrior daughter, loses her immortality in opera's most famous act of filial defiance. Sung in German with English subtitles. *Various theaters; www.fathomevents.com. Sat., 9 a.m. (live); Wed., 12:30 & 6:30 p.m. (encore). $16-$24.*

The Urban Ocean. How do whales, other sea life, windsurfers, sailboats and massive container vessels coexist in shipping channels? *Aquarium of the Pacific, www.aquariumofpacific.org/events/info/urban_ocean_festival/. Sat.-Sun., 11 a.m., 1:15, 2:30 & 4:30 p.m. $17.95-$29.95, members/children 3 and younger, free.*



COURTESY THE METROPOLITAN OPERA

A League of Their Own. Two sisters join the first female professional baseball league. *The Frida Cinema, thefridacinema.org. Sat.-Sun., noon, 2:30, 5:30 & 8 p.m. $7-$10.*

The Rocky Horror Picture Show. Live shadow-cast troupe Midnight Insanity performs. *Art Theatre, arttheatrelongbeach.org. Sat., 11:55 p.m. $9-$12.*

The Karate Kid. Viewers will see a 4K restoration of the influential 1984 movie, a special introduction by Ralph Macchio and Mr. Johnny Lawrence himself (William Zabka) and a sneak peek at season two of their YouTube series, *Cobra Kai. Various theaters; www.fathomevents.com. Sun., 1 & 4 p.m., Tues., 4 & 7 p.m. $12.50.*

Loving Vincent + The Impossible Dream. It's a double feature with the first entirely oil-painted feature-length movie and a documentary about the decade-long, painstaking process of producing the 2017 drama. Directors Dorota Kobiela and Hugh Welchman detail the final days of Vincent Van Gogh, as seen through the eyes of a young man delivering the troubled artist's final letter. *The Frida Cinema, thefridacinema.org. Mon.-Thurs., April 4, 1, 4 & 7 p.m. $7-$10.*

The Rolling Stones Rock and Roll Circus. Originally filmed in December 1968 as a television special, two nights of concert footage capture the final live shows for Stones founder Brian Jones, who died within six months of filming. *Starlight Cinema City, (714) 970-6700; also at Starlight Triangle Cinemas, (714) 650-4300; starlightcinemas.com. Mon.-Thurs., April 4, 7 p.m. Call theaters for ticket prices.*

Somm 3. The 2018 documentary by 2005 Dodge College alums Jason and Christina Wise captures three great wine legends meeting to drink the rarest bottles of their careers as the best blind tasters gather to settle an age-old argument. The results could change the world of wine forever. Professor David Ward moderates a Q&A with the filmmakers after the screening. *Chapman University; chapman.edu/dodge/. Mon., 7 p.m. Free.*

Pee-Wee's Big Adventure. Tim Burton's 1985 cult classic has the eccentric man-child setting off on an adventure after someone snatches his beloved red, customized Schwinn (a.k.a. the greatest bicycle on Earth). *The Frida Cinema, thefridacinema.org. Wed.-Thurs., April 4, 2:30, 5:30 & 8 p.m. $7-$10.*

First Man. Damien Chazelle's 2018 bio-drama on Neil Armstrong shows the NASA astronaut rigorously training to become the first man to walk on the moon. *Fullerton Public Library, (714) 738-6327. Wed., 6 p.m. Free.*

The Color Purple. In Steven Spielberg's 1985 drama that was adapted from Alice Walker's novel, a black Southern woman (Golden Globe winner Whoopi Goldberg) struggles to find her identity after suffering abuse from her father (Adolph Caesar), her husband (Danny Glover) and others over four decades. *Starlight Cinema City, (714) 970-6700. Wed., 7 p.m. $5-$12.*

Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets. Chris Columbus directed the 2002 franchise flick that has Harry (Daniel Radcliffe) haunted by a strange voice as he returns to a Hogwarts plagued by mysterious attacks. *Regency South Coast Village, (714) 557-5701. Wed., 7 p.m. $9.*

The Power to Heal: Medicare and the Civil Rights Revolution. This hour-long public-television documentary is about the historic struggle to secure equal and adequate access to health care for all Americans. Central to the story is the tale of the then-new Medicare program, which was used to mount a dramatic, coordinated effort that desegregated thousands of hospitals across the country in a matter of months. *UC Irvine School of Law, (949) 824-0066. Thurs., April 4, 11:45 a.m. Free.*

Ocean's 11. Not to be confused with the artful George Clooney vehicle is the 1960 original with the suave Danny Ocean (Frank Sinatra) gathering a group of his World War II compatriots (who include fellow Rat Packers Dean Martin and Sammy Davis Jr.) to pull off the ultimate Las Vegas heist. *Fullerton Public Library, (714) 738-6327. Thurs., April 4, 1 p.m. Free.*

Transform. Marlon Bercht's movie is about her life and the LGBTQ community. *Art Theatre, arttheatrelongbeach.org. Thurs., April 4, 9 p.m. $7.*

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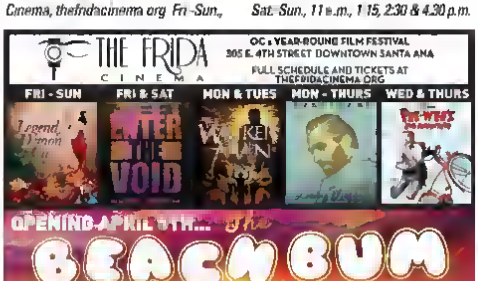

Exotic Wonders

A pair of compelling exhibitions—both artistic and animalistic—are now on display in Irvine and Fullerton

BY DAVE BARTON

At the end of the day, we're on our own. Even if we're partnered or surrounded by friends, there comes a moment when others simply can't help and we have to muddle our solitary way through our trials and tribulations. We fuck up, fall down, and have to figure a way to pick ourselves back up again. The great joy of art is that it can take that difficult emotion, that pit of despair and disaffection, and define it, give it meaning and help you put it into a consumable context. Simply put, great art tells you that you may be on your own, but you're not *alone*, that someone before you felt what you felt, went through what you went through and is openly acknowledging it.

Nowhere is that solitary twisting of grief, joy and sublimity more evident than in the phantasmagoric work of printmaker/painter Joseph Paul Gerges. His solo exhibition "Quietus" at Irvine Fine Arts Center—as well as the elegant and informative hardcover book accompanying it—presents him as a striking artist resurrecting a laborious Old Master medium that's equal parts emotion, exploitation and raw, open wound. Using the material of a treasure trove of bad life experience that affects most of us at some point—divorce, estrangement, depression, anger, the death of a loved one—Gerges shapes it into a series of images that embrace his crushing sadness.

The Latin word *quietus* means "to quit," an archaic word for death, but it can also refer to passage, a moving from one place to another. In Gerges' world, dead and wounded animals, often lying in their own gore, are interspersed between paintings of his two very much alive daughters, tender prints of a trio of sleeping animals cover one wall in a Warhol grid of repetition, there are gilded self-portraits that resemble mug shots, roadkill, Baconesque sides of meat hanging on hooks, video images of his ailing father alongside process videos showing the painstaking method and precision required to make the art hanging on the walls.

Gerges' images are delicate, detailed, intimate things, not only in their themes, but also in the labor that goes into making them. He's showing you things you may not want to see, but that he feels are important to look at, to notice, and he does so unblinkingly. He's saying that there is life in death and death in life, and sometimes there's more than you can bear, but you can, and you will, so let's walk together and talk about these hard things.

PORCUS QUIETUS

COURTESY OF IRVINE FINE ARTS CENTER

The gruesomeness of a handful of images doesn't make the show depressing or even dark. Quite the opposite, in fact. The profound takeaway is that the intermingling of the precious and the unthinkable is good for the soul. It's an expansive, welcome vision.

On Saturdays, anyone can feed the insect inmates at Fullerton Museum Center. Insectariums built to resemble an ancient jail are complete with metal doors and oversized locks, sinks, toilets, and beds. Inside the half-dozen cells are Chilean rose tarantulas, black widow spiders and scorpions the size of your palm, some in plain view, others hiding from the prying eyes of the tap-on-the-glass public. A feature of the traveling museum show "Dr. Entomo's Palace of Exotic Wonders," the feeding is popular with the young ones. "There's a lot of squealing and screaming," curator Kelly Chidester says. "The kids love it."

It's not just the kids. My friend and I, Chidester as our guide, gasped and squeaked a few times ourselves. We shook involuntarily at the idea of the millipede excreting cyanide, peeked into the dim boxes to see scorpions glow under black light, examined the three stages of beetle larvae living in the cover of a fake sarcophagus, listened intently for hissing cockroaches, and watched giant vinegaroons stalk and devour crickets.

It's a nature show, not an art show, but there's a tongue-in-cheek gaudiness to the affair that's perfect for the young ones, and it's knowingly tacky/camp enough for adults to appreciate. The walls are decorated with insect facts and festooned with flamboyant, lurid banners that promise "The Devil With Two Heads!! ALIVE!", in others, giant insects prey on a man in a hazmat suit spraying him with a noxious cloud, reminding me of those elaborately awful Ghanaian movie posters. There's even a grotesque "frozen" bit of carnival fakery, screaming, "TerAntTula! AMAZING! BIZARRE!," something guaranteed to send you back in time to a cheesy sideshow in a Middle America state fair. Even if you've never been to one.

"JOSEPH PAUL GERGES: QUIETUS" at Irvine Fine Arts Center Main Gallery, 14321 Yale Ave., Irvine, (949) 724-6880, www.cityofirvine.org/irvine-fine-arts-center/current-exhibitions. Open Thurs., 10 a.m.-9 p.m., Fri., 10 a.m.-5 p.m., Sat., 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Through Sat. Free

"DR. ENTOMO'S PALACE OF EXOTIC WONDERS" at Fullerton Museum Center, 201 N. Pomona Ave., Fullerton, (714) 738-6545, www.cityoffullerton.com/gov/departments/museum/default.asp. Open Tues.-Wed., 10 a.m.-5 p.m., Thurs., 10 a.m.-9 p.m., Fri.-Sun., noon-4 p.m. Through April 14. $5, students/seniors, $4, children younger than 12, $3, children 5 and younger, free.

ARTS OVERLOAD

» AIMEE MURILLO

March 29-April 4

20TH WOMEN IN FOCUS CONFERENCE. Listen in on discussions and panels on women in the professional film industry. Fri., 1:30 p.m. Free with RSVP. Dodge College of Film and Media Arts at Chapman University, 283 N. Cypress St., Orange. chapman.edu/womeninfocus.

THE *LAST DAYS OF JUDAS ISCARIOT*. Stephen Adly Gurgis' thought-provoking and humorous play takes place in a court room in Purgatory to learn the life and back story of Jesus' betrayer. Fri.-Sat., 7:30 p.m., Sun., 6:30 p.m. Through April 7. $9.99-$15. Philips Hall Theatre at Santa Ana College, 1530 W. 17th St., Santa Ana, (714) 564-5661, www.sac.edu/theatre/events.

UOYARD SALE. LOCAL AND VINTAGE EVENT. Urban Outfitters hosts this yard sale, which also offers snacks and treats while you shop. Sat., 11 a.m.-4 p.m. Free. Pacific City, 21010 Pacific Coast Hwy., Huntington Beach. www.gopacificity.com.

"A NEW HOPE: THE *STAR WARS* ART OF ROBERT BAILEY". In celebration of its third anniversary, Hilbert Museum presents this exhibit of the Canadian artist's realistic paintings of the George Lucas-created world. Opening reception, Sat., 5-7 p.m. Gallery open Mon.-Fri., 7 a.m.-2 p.m., Sat.-Sun., 8 a.m.-noon. Through April 5. Free. Leatherby Libraries, second floor at Chapman University, 1 University Dr., Orange. (714) 532-7718; www.chapman.edu/library/about/index.aspx.

FLAMENCO LIVE. A new monthly showcase of flamenco dancing in an intimate setting, with special guest performer Lola Mayo. Sun., 2 p.m. $25-$35. Naranjita Flamenco, 301 E. Katella Ave., Orange; www.naranjitaflamenco.com.

420-FRIENDLY PLANT MIGHT BUILD YOUR OWN SUCCULENT GARDEN. An instructor leads participants in creating their own terrariums. All supplies provided, including bud samples. Recreational cannabis and alcohol is not mandatory, but interested parties must provide their own. Sun., 4 p.m. $65. Brush Tokes, Newport Beach (location provided after ticket purchase). www.brushtokesoc.com.

"PROTECTING MOTHER EARTH". A group art show featuring mostly Native American artists whose work encompasses the theme of protecting the natural environment. Open Tues.-Sun., noon-4 p.m. Through April 28. Free. Muckenthaler Center, 1201 W. Malvern Ave., Fullerton. (714) 738-6595. themuck.org.

***HEISENBERG*.** A quirky and unlikely love story that blooms between a free-spirited American woman and a 70-year-old British butcher after she plants a kiss on his neck in a busy London train station. Wed.-Fri., 7:30 p.m., Sat., 2 & 7:30 p.m., Sun., 1 p.m. Through April 14. $56-$86. Laguna Playhouse, 606 Laguna Canyon Rd., Laguna Beach, (949) 497-2787, www.lagunaplayhouse.com.

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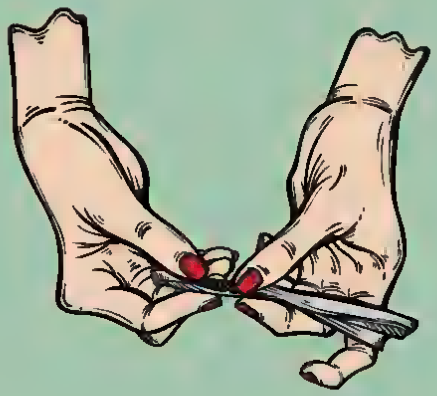

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DESERT STARS ALUMNI TESS PARKS (LEFT) AND TIJUANA PANTHERS SET THE MOOD AFTER SUNDOWN

COURTESY OF DESERT STARS

A Festival In Bloom

Desert Stars gives psych-rock revelers a new home in Joshua Tree

BY NATE JACKSON

Whether it's a flower or a festival, part of surviving in the desert means being able to live without many resources. It's the kind of environment built on creativity and strength that Tommy Dietrick and his Desert Stars Festival continue to thrive on 11 years after starting the festival at Pappy and Harriet's in Pioneertown.

"I think the level of artistry increases when you don't have that heavy checkbook access," Dietrick says. "In 2008, we literally had $300 left to build a little acoustic stage, and my production designer, Christian, ... says, 'Don't worry. I got this.'"

Dietrick came back three hours later to find his comrade standing next to a fully functional stage with lights and lumber purchased from Home Depot. "I have a photo of it somewhere," Dietrick says. "I'm told it still exists 10 to 11 years later."

Similarly, Desert Stars has managed to hold its niche within the high desert kingdom of Joshua Tree and Pioneertown as a haven for shoegaze and psychedelic rock. Through the ebb and flow of festivals competing to be the biggest, Desert Stars' enduring charm has been the intimacy that comes from an event thrown for 1,000 people or less. Sure, there have been years when Dietrick has tried to go big with his boutique festival, but usually it just left him feeling burnt-out.

"The years we were trying to go bigger, I wasn't enjoying it as much," Dietrick says. In addition to moving the festival from fall to spring and to its newly purchased location on the east block of the Joshua Tree Arts District, Desert Stars is also excited to return to what Dietrick calls "the 2015 vibe."

"That's the year we had Swervedriver and the Lemonheads and Entrance Band, and it was this perfect amount of talent," Dietrick says. "I'll let the bigger festivals spend $300,000 on talent. We're still this DIY boutique thing, and we're still here 11 to 12 years later."

This year, the two-day festival hosts upward of 21 acts from all over SoCal as well as a few international bands, headlined by a double whammy of indie-music legend Dean Wareham, doing a solo performance of material from his legendary alt-rock band Galaxie 500 on Friday and with revered dream-pop quartet Luna on Saturday.

Dietrick grew up on Wareham's music, from Galaxie 500 classics such as 1989's *On Fire* to Luna's entire catalog, including their venerated 1995 album *Pup Tent*, so landing this headliner was akin to watching the stars align. "We'd had Dean and [his band] Luna on our radar for a few years, and we'd been talking about it, and this was the perfect time to do it, so we pulled the trigger on that," Dietrick says. "And it works out great for Dean and his wife because they live in Los Angeles, so it's a two-hour drive out here [for] some great shows."

Guests on March 29 will be treated to some far-out songs and storytelling courtesy of Joel Gion, former tambourine player for the Brian Jonestown Massacre—think of the decades' worth of tales this dude has! Wash all that down with a broad spectrum of acts from as far as Italy (the dark, modern rock of New Candys), popular returning acts (LA's Spindrift and Joshua Tree's Jesika Von Rabbit) and a few OC-based up-and-comers (Spirit Mother and the No 44). "There's some really cool opening and support acts, and I tell people every year, 'Don't just show up for the main ones,' you know, because we hand-pick all of them, and there's some really good ones this year," Dietrick says.

Now a full-time resident of Joshua Tree, where he also runs a recording studio called SkyLab, Dietrick's mission with the venue on his newly purchased land behind Zannedelions Boutique on 29 Palms Highway is to create opportunities for locals who want to be a part of creating the next chapter in the festival's history, from hiring local construction and building crews to offering slots to high desert vendors in the marketplace inside the festival grounds. "One of the things I'm trying to do here ... is to create opportunities that weren't there before," Dietrick says. "We are always trying to include and create local jobs."

Desert Stars' new location is about twice the size of its former Pappy and Harriet's spot. But Dietrick is pledging to keep things very small, opting to only sell 400 tickets in order to test the infrastructure of the festival's new digs, including a craft-beer garden and local food options. "We wanna be responsible because it's Joshua Tree," Dietrick says. "Everyone knows Joshua Tree has felt some strain over the years with new production companies coming in, and the town is not really receptive to it."

Fortunately, having been in the area with this festival for more than a decade, Dietrick's relationship with the locals is pretty rock-solid, and his new venue presents possibilities for the community to use it for smaller, offshoot gatherings. As the festival season approaches, it's a time of rebirth for Desert Stars, a chance for it to re-establish its psych-rock roots and thrive into the next decade.

"Spring is new life, new direction—everything is blooming," Dietrick says. "We had this great 10-year party at Pappy and Harriet's, and now we have our own party to look forward to. We're still keeping it on the boutique side."

NJACKSON@OCWEEKLY.COM

DESERT STARS FESTIVAL

featuring Dean Wareham, Luna, Joel Gion, Chaos Chaos, Spindrift, Jesika Von Rabbit and more, at Desert Stars Outdoor Theater, El Reposo Circle, 29 Palms Hwy., Joshua Tree, www.desertstarsfestival.com. Fri., 3-11 p.m.; Sat., noon-11 p.m. $48.50-$119. All ages.

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4/12	COMMON SENSE
4/13	MADDOGS AND THE ENGLISHMAN (JOE COCKER TRIBUTE)
4/14	ALBERT LEE
4/19	AN EVENING WITH THE MUSICAL BOX
4/20	LOS LOROS
4/25	RITA WILSON
4/26	REVEREND NORTON NEAT
4/27	AMROSIA
4/28	KEIKO MATSUI
5/3	VENICE
5/4	BOBLIN
5/5	ARETHA: QUEEN OF SOUL FT: CHARITY LOCKHART
5/9	ROGER CLYNE & THE PEACEMAKERS
5/10	RAUL MALO
5/11	SONGS & STORIES: AN EVENING WITH ART ALEXAKIS of EVERCLEAR, CHRIS COLLINGWOOD of FOUNTAINS OF WAYNE, MAX COLLINS of EVE 6, JOHN WOZNIAK of MARCY PLAYGROUND
5/12	PROJECT PRESLEY (ELVIS PRESLEY TRIBUTE)
5/18	FOREVER ROD (ROD STEWART TRIBUTE)
5/17	AN EVENING WITH COWBOY JUNKIES
5/19	THE 5TH DIMENSION
5/22	WILLIE K
5/23	PUDDLES PITY PARTY
5/24	OINGO BOINGO FORMER MEMBERS
5/26	BLIND MELON
5/30	LITTLE RIVER BAND

UPCOMING SHOWS

5/31	YOUNG DUBLINERS	7/13	LDR LONELY BOYS
6/1	DESPERADO	7/23	TED NUGENT
6/2	SERPENTINE FIRE (EARTH, WIND AND FIRE TRIBUTE)	7/24	TED NUGENT
6/7	ASIA FT. JOHN PAYNE	7/28	STRUNZ AND FARAH
6/8	BRETT DENNEN	8/3	HONK
6/11	JOHN PAUL WHITE (AND HIS BAND)	8/29	SAVOY BROWN
6/14	GARY NOEY	9/8	GLENN MILLER ORCHESTRA
6/15	DSR	9/12	ADRIAN BELEW
6/16	BEE GEES GOLD	9/20	HERMAN'S HERMITS
6/21	CASH'D OUT (JOHNNY CASH TRIBUTE)	9/21	HERMAN'S HERMITS
6/22	Y&T	9/22	GARY PUCKETT
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MARIA FONSECA

Regeneration

Pascuala Ilabaca gives Chile's new crop of musicians a feminine feel

BY GABRIEL SAN ROMÁN

Pascuala Ilabaca's first memory of Chile is a momentous one. Her parents, both artists, returned to the South American nation from Spain to help define its political destiny. A national referendum in 1988 held the fate of General Augusto Pinochet's brutal reign at the ballot box. Though she was a child at the time, "I remember the day that people voted to end the Pinochet dictatorship," Ilabaca says. "Everyone was in the streets, very happy and laughing."

The plebiscite also allowed for a cultural rebirth in a land famed for its poets and folk singers. Exiled left-wing musicians, such as the legendary folk group Inti-Illimani, returned home before the historic campaign. And Ilabaca, an acclaimed accordionist and singer, focused on that memory of a country at a crossroads to become a leading voice of an exciting new generation of Chilean musicians.

"We have different roles," she says. "For me, as a woman, it's very important to show the importance of women in Chilean arts. I've been working for 12 years to change people's experience of feminine art."

She draws inspiration from two principal, if overshadowed, *chilenas* in history: Nobel Prize-winning poet Gabriela Mistral and Violeta Parra, the godmother of Latin American protest music.

Ilabaca's recording career began in 2008 with *Pascuala Canta a Violeta*, a homage to the late folk singer's lesser-known songs. The effort earned the musician a trip to India at the invitation of Michelle Bachelet, Chile's first woman president. "I discovered that this division of the world between West and East is not true," she says. By the time she released *Diablo Rojo, Diablo Verde* with her band Fauna, that ethos of universality was beautifully blended, the stirring percussion of the Andes meshes with jazzy flourishes, swaying *cumbias* and festive *cuecas*, the soundtrack to the national dance of Chile. The album also established Ilabaca's lyrical prowess, expressing themes of feminism and love.

She continued her penchant for poetry with *Rey Loj*, a play on words that means "King Clock" and serves as the main theme for the album. "I was talking about how we suffer and are always connected to the clock as the king of time," Ilabaca says. "But also, we have the beat of our heart and the pulse of our blood, which is different. Sometimes we need to connect with our inner time."

An ambassador of contemporary Chilean music, Ilabaca brings her accordion and eclecticism to audiences around the world. She doesn't find the assumed rigidness between stiff North Americans and expressive South Americans, and wherever expectations do arise, she views them as a challenge. "This is part of the stereotypes that I love to break," Ilabaca says. "In my concerts, you don't need to know any Latin dances. The key is to feel the energy of empowerment that we have in Latin America and dance as you like."

Abroad, the musician also finds reaffirmation of what it means to be Chilean, a bit of an existential quandary for others during her university days. "We have a social history that has inspired people all over the world and excellent poets," she says. "This makes me want to show that we are full of identity, not bereft of it."

When Ilabaca visits the States, she'll bring her latest studio album, *El Mito de la Pérgola*, in tow. "I'm very happy with how it turned out," she says. "It's my favorite." It focuses on music borne out of social settings in all its variant rhythms, a subject of intense research for Ilabaca. It also holds a promise for a better tomorrow, not so different from the jubilance that formed her first memories of Chile.

"If we all join—artists and community—in the center of a public square, we're going to change the world," she says. "This is the meaning of the album."

PASCUALA ILABACA Y FAUNA
at Soka University Performing Arts Center, 1 University Dr., Aliso Viejo, (949) 480-4278, www.soka.edu/pac. Fri., 8 p.m. $26-$30. All ages.

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AVA LUNA, RUDY OE ANDA, SWEET NOBODY 8 p.m., $8, 21+. The Wayfarer 843 W. 19th St., Costa Mesa. (949) 764-0039. www.wayfarercm.com

ROYCE AVENUE, TYLER HILTON 7 p.m., $25, all ages. House of Blues at Anaheim GardeeWalk, 400 W. Disney Way, Anaheim. (714) 778-2583; www.houseofblues.com/aeaheim.

GORILLA BISCUITS 6.30 p.m., $30, all ages. Gardee Amp (The Locker Room), 12762 Main St., Garden Grove. (949) 415-8544. gardeeamp.com.

L.A. GUNS 6 p.m., $25-21+. La Santa, 220 E. Third St., Santa Ana. (657) 231-6005. www.lasantaac.com.

WET, RILO KISH, HELENA 9 p.m., $30, all ages. The Observatory, 3503 S. Harbor Blvd., Santa Ana, (714) 957-0600. www.observatoryoc.com.

Saturday

THE OEVIOUS MEANS, BEAUX GRIS GRIS & THE APOCALYPSE; TIM JOHNSON, DANIEL MINAYA 7 p.m., $11-$15. 21+. The Wayfarer 843 W. 19th St. Costa Mess, (949) 764-0039; www.wayfarercm.com

EMO NIGHT RSODRLYN 11 p.m., $10-$12, all ages. The Observatory 3503 S. Harbor Blvd. Santa Ana (714) 957-0600. www.observatoryoc.com

MESSER CHUPS, THE CREEPY CREEPS 8 p.m., $12-$15. 21+. Alex's Bar, 2913 E. Anaheim St., Lneg Beach. (562) 434-8292, www.alexsbar.com

SHE WANTS REVENGE, WARBLY JETS 8 p.m., $20, all ages. The Observatory, 3503 S. Harbor Blvd., Santa Ana. (714) 957-0600; www.observatoryoc.com

UNDER COVERS OF DARKNESS (STROKES TRIBUTE). 9 p.m. free. 21+. La Santa, 220 E. Third St. Santa Ana. (657) 231-6005, www.lasantaac.com.

ZERRAHEAD; ASSUMING WE SURVIVE, LA PRDRESKA 7 p.m., $5, all ages. House of Blues at Anaheim GardeeWalk, 400 W. Disney Way. Anaheim (714) 778-2583. www.houseofblues.com/aeaheim.

Sunday

GUNNA. 7 p.m., $29.50, all ages. House of Blues at Anaheim GardeeWalk, 400 W. Disney Way. Anaheim, (714) 778-2583. www.houseofblues.com/anaheim.

MARR SULTAN, THE SCHIZOPHONICS; LOS HURRICANES, VAGUESS 2 p.m. $10, 21+. Alex's Bar 2913 E. Anaheim St. Long Beach. (562) 434-8292; www.alexsbar.com.

ROY RLAIR 9 p.m. $18, all ages. The Constellation Room, 3503 S. Harbor Blvd., Santa Ana, (714) 957-0600; www.observatoryac.com.

WAVELENGTH TAKEOVER WITH ADAM ER, LIANO, SOL SAUCE, SMOG, NANL 8 p.m., $5, 21+. La Santa, 220 E. Third St., Santa Ana. (657) 231-6005; www.lasaeteac.com

Monday

A BOOGIE WIT DA HOODIE. 7 p.m. $27.50. all ages. House of Blues at Anaheim GardenWalk, 400 W. Disney Way. Anaheim. (714) 778-2583; www.houseofblues.com/aeaheim

Tuesday

CHILDREN OF RODOM, SWALLOW THE SUN, WOLFHEART, FRAGMENTUM 6.45 p.m., $30. all ages. The Observatory 3503 S. Harbor Blvd. Santa Ana. (714) 957-0600; www.observatoryac.com

Wednesday

FELLOW ROBOT, RUNDY; THE NO 44; ASI FUI 8 p.m. free. 21+. Alex's Bar, 2913 E. Anaheim St., Long Beach. (562) 434-8292. www.alexsbar.com.

JEFFERTITTI'S NILE, KING TREE & THE EARTH MOTHERS, TOKYO LUCKY HOLE. 8 p.m. $7, 21+. The Wayfarer. 843 W. 19th St. Costa Mesa. (949) 764-0039. www.wayfarercm.com.

THE SHAKES; THE HATE DRUGS, SKIN MAG 6.30 p.m. $10-$12, all ages. Garden Amp (The Locker Room). 12762 Main St. Gardee Grove. (949) 415-8544. gardeeamp.com

Thursday, April 4

BALTO, THRIFT, JAME 8 p.m., $5. 21+. The Wayfarer 843 W. 19th St. Costa Mesa. (949) 764-0039; www.wayfarercm.com.

ECHOS 9 p.m., $10. all ages. The Observatory 3503 S. Harbor Blvd. Santa Ana. (714) 957-0600; www.observatoryac.com

GIRLPOOL. 8 p.m., $17.50. 21+. La Santa. 220 E. Third St., Santa Ana. (657) 231-6005. www.lasantaac.com.

JOHNNY HOOTROCR, RUFF ENUFF 8 p.m. $5, 21+. Alex's Bar 2913 E. Anaheim St. Long Beach, (562) 434-8292, www.alexsbar.com.

Revolution Hall

Savage Love Live stormed into Revolution Hall in Portland, Oregon. Comedian Connie Lucas absolutely killed it before our sold-out crowd; singer/songwriter Elisabeth Foley-Fink performed an amazing set, and two lovely couples competed in our first (and most likely last) Mama Bird Cupcake Eating Contest. I wasn't able to get to all of the audience-submitted questions, so I'm going to power through as many as I can in this week's column.

How do you handle it if your partner constantly apologizes during sex? "Sorry, sorry, sorry…"
With sensitivity, tact, and compassion—and if none of that shit works, try duct tape.

Should I continue to have casual sex with someone I'm in love with?
If it's casual for them and not casual for you, *and* they've made it clear it will never be anything other than casual for them, you're going to get hurt—which I suspect you know. Now, if you think the pain of going without sex with them will be greater than the pain you'll feel when they inevitably meet someone else and move on, by all means, keep fucking them. (Spoiler: the pain of the latter > the pain of the former.)

Best tricks for a quick female orgasm and how to keep yourself from overthinking it?
My female friends swear by a little legal weed, where available (or a little illegal weed, where necessary), and a nice, big, powerful vibrator.

My five-year relationship ended abruptly. Is there a time frame for getting over it?
Studies vary. Some have found it takes the average person 11 weeks; some have found it takes half the length of the relationship itself; and some have found it takes longer if it was a marriage that ended. But don't wait until you're completely over it to get out there—because getting out there can help you get over it.

Besides a fiber-rich diet, what are your tips for a newbie to anal play? Size is a BIG factor, and it's creating a HUGE mental block whenever anything goes near my hole.
Start small, e.g., lubed-up fingers and small toys. And don't graduate from tongues/fingers/toys to someone's big ol' dick in a single session. Start small and stay small until your hole's dread at the thought of taking something HUGE is replaced by a sincerely held, quasi-religious belief in the absolute necessity of taking something huge.

What is the formula for getting comfortable farting in front of a partner?
Same as comedy: tragedy + time.

In the era of online dating, how do you navigate the people who think the grass will always be greener and have difficulty committing to truly building a relationship?
The expression "the grass is always greener on the other side of the fence" has its roots in a Latin proverb first translated into English in 1545—which means the sentiment predates dating apps by, oh, roughly half a millennium. But the "paradox of choice," or the idea that people have a hard time choosing when presented with too many options, has certainly complicated modern dating. But too many options beats too few, in my opinion, and it certainly beats no options at all…e.g., deserted islands, compulsory heterosexuality, unhappy arranged marriages, etc.

Any advice for a 22-year-old woman who meets only end boys who need a mom?
Your handwriting is such that I thought you wrote "sub boys," and I was going to respond, "Enjoy." But then I reread your question: *end* boys, not *sub* boys. Okay, if you're meeting only one type of person or all the people you're meeting have a certain character flaw, either you're seeking that type of person out—consciously or subconsciously—or you're projecting your own shit onto that person. This is a case where the best people to ask for a gut/reality check are your actual friends, not your friendly sex-advice columnist.

How good are cock rings? I tried a stretch rubber one, and it was just uncomfortable. Is it worth more time and research?
Cock rings are made from all sorts of different materials, and it's important to find the material (rubber, metal, leather) and fit (snug, but not too tight) that works for you. I definitely think you should experiment a bit before giving up—cock rings are great. And hey, did you know there's a Wiki page with a lot of good info about cock rings? (Wikipedia.org/wiki/cock_ring.)

Will you be my sperm donor?
Well, that depends. Are you male, between the ages of 25 and 55, and (my entirely subjective notion about what is) hot? Then sure!

My partner wants me to move in with him and have kids. He also wants an open relationship and to be able to father children for other women if they choose to be single moms. I'm not comfortable with that. How can I express this without blocking him from getting what he wants?
By not moving in with him, by not having kids with him, and by not continuing to partner with him.

Why wasn't semen designed to stay in a woman's vagina? It always makes a terrible mess. I hate waiting for it to leak out of me.
I wasn't around when semen and vaginas were designed—I'm old, but not that old—and I'm pretty sure they didn't have a designer. I'm also guessing leakage wasn't a problem until our ancestors began walking upright about 4 million years ago.

My mother-in-law had episodes of amnesia after orgasm in her 50s. Have you heard of this? WILL IT HAPPEN TO ME?
I have not! I HAVE NO IDEA! I have also Googled this for you, and—holy shit—it's a thing, and it has a name: transient global amnesia (TGA). Apparently any form of strenuous exercise can trigger TGA. So don't fuck, don't run, don't hike! Just sit still, and you'll be fine!

What do you think is the most needed focus of left activism in the United States today?
Most needed: defeating Trump *and* combating climate change. Most prevalent: relitigating the 2016 Democratic primary.

My mom finishes every call with "God bless you." I'm not a believer, but it's not something we could ever talk about. I usually ignore it, sometimes I say it back, but it's always awkward. What should I do?
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On the Lovecast *(savagelovecast.com), Dan chats with comedian Kate Willett. Contact him via mail@savagelove.net, follow him on Twitter @fakedansavage, and visit ITMFA.org.*

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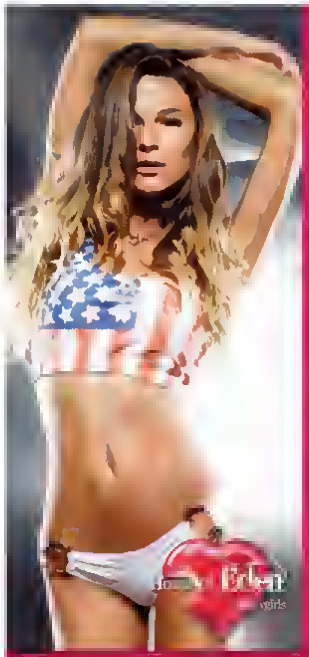

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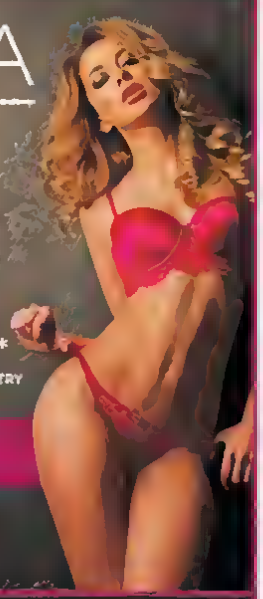

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Before the thick cloud of smoke had time to clear, I saw a bit of color and the faint outline of a smile creep across their face as we shared one of those magical moments usually seen in cheesy Coke commercials. My mouth and lungs filled with a sweet, somewhat-sour aroma of those delicious lemon cookies I used to quietly steal from the pantry before dinner. You should expect to feel giddy and euphoric while time slowly passes, leaving you with nothing to do but enjoy yourself.

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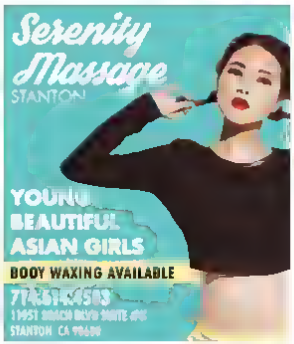
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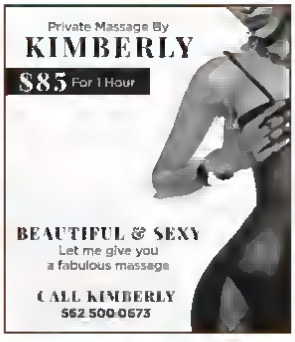
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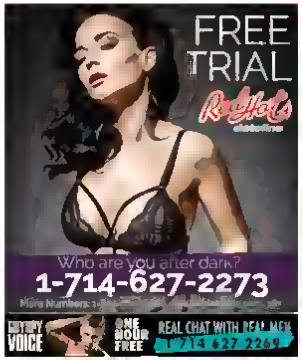
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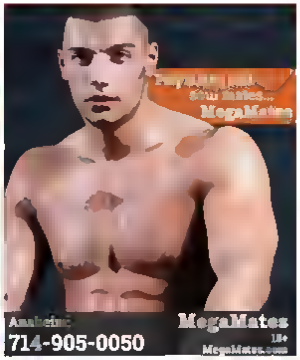
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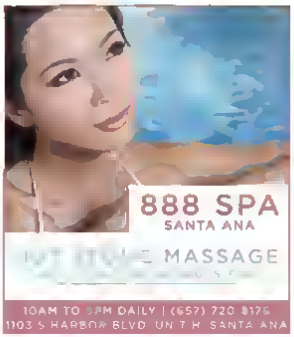
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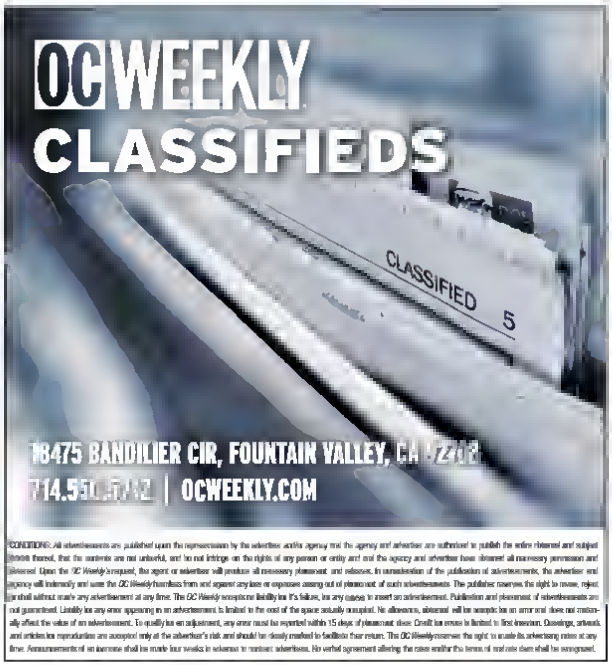

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Judicial District of	At (Town)	Docket number (If any)
New Haven	New Haven	NNH FA 18 304 38 90

Plaintiff's name (Last, first, middle initial)	Defendant's name (Last, first, middle initial)
Lucero, Leticia	Orozco, Juan C.

Notice to Juan C. Orozco of parts unknown.
(Name of person to whom notice is being given)

A Complaint / Application / Motion has been filed with this court that asks for ("x" all that apply):

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If this notice is to inform you of a divorce, dissolution of civil union, legal separation, annulment, custody or visitation case, Automatic Court Orders have been issued in this case as required by section 25-5 of the Connecticut Practice Book and are a part of the Complaint / Application on file with the Court.

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(Thedill, J.)		03/07/2018

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Modjestic Adventures

'Titi, Nunu, and Klembolo: Helena Modjeska's Fairy Tale Book' enchants at Laguna Art Museum

BY LISA BLACK

While wildflowers line our freeways, the hills are emerald green and turning yellow with mustard, the desert's exploding with poppies, and *billions* of painted ladies are flying north, the world's children walk out of schools in coordinated protests over threats to their future. As I sat outside in the sun after the protests on March 15, with butterflies zooming all around me, I was reminded of the image of Mother Nature becoming so fed up with humans that she shakes us off in a cataclysmic shrug.

That latent power, which may be energizing the young to fight for the planet they'll inherit, and the astonishing beauty of the butterfly migration is manifest in a hand-written and painted book Helena Modjeska (1840-1909) made over the course of several years in the canyon named for the acclaimed actress.

The inventive fairy tale relates the harrowing adventures of two young brothers who live on Mars. Things get dire when their fighting over a giant butterfly that has landed in their honey results in them ripping it in two. Titi and Nunu launch their quest for magic to set things right, accompanied by their six-legged blue dog, Klembolo.

Presented as a gift to her grandson in 1896, the book eventually made its way from Felix Modjeski to the Museum of the City of New York to UC Irvine's Special Collections and Archives. Last year, the UCLA Library Conservation Center was entrusted with its preservation, but before the 147 remarkable pages are re-bound, they are being displayed at the Laguna Art Museum (LAM) as "*Titi, Nunu, and Klembolo*: Helena Modjeska's Fairy Tale Book."

The original work features parallel columns of English and Polish text, and winding their way up and in between the two languages are intricately rendered centipedes, beetles and spiders, alien flora, an incense pot hanging from a decorated hand that's suspended from a hook. Monsters on land and sea terrorize the lads, including one formidable creature seen roasting a mummy-wrapped boy on a spit.

As I was engrossed in this gruesome tableau, I ran into a friend who will soon portray the Polish actress/artist/storyteller, and we shared our research on Modjeska's life.

A much older actor and family "guardian" became her first husband, though the union wasn't legal. Modjeska developed her acting chops and soaked up how to tour the provinces in his "second-rate" troupe, but she left him after giving birth to a second child. While dominating the stage back in her hometown of Krakow, Modjeska met a nobleman who became known in the U.S. as Count Bozenta. The couple wed, and with her surviving son, they moved to Warsaw, where their home became an intellectual and artistic salon as Modjeska's acting career soared, primarily in Shakespearean roles.

Things got hot for the superstar when she was openly critical of Imperial Russian rule over much of Poland. Modjeska recounted in a lecture at the Chicago World's Fair in 1893 that the tsar had banned her from performing in Russian-controlled parts of her own country. "It was not my destiny to die for my country, as was my cherished dream," Modjeska wrote in *Memories and Impressions of Helena Modjeska: An Autobiography*. "Instead of becoming a heroine, I had to be satisfied with acting heroines. Exchanging the armor for tinsel, weapon for words."

Imagining herself a Joan of Arc saving her country from its oppressors may have been key to her art, in addition to what's been described as her warm, velvety voice.

To save themselves, Modjeska, the count and several friends left their partitioned country to get back to nature in the land of freedom. But the immigrants' utopian dream on their ranch in Anaheim didn't pan out because of drought and a general lack of farming skills. So in 1877, Modjeska returned to the stage, premiering in San Francisco to acclaim despite her heavy accent. She became a true actor/manager; not only did she play the lead roles and design and make the costumes, but she also produced, managed and publicized the grueling train tours that saw the company performing eight times a week in rural towns and major cities from the West Coast to the East.

It was in between these triumphant expeditions that Modjeska rested at the Orange County canyon house she named Arden, where she worked on *Titi, Nunu, and Klembolo*. Now on view at LAM is the desk she sat at as well as the finished book. The folios are tilted up at the perfect angle to enjoy the intricacies of the unfolding tale in ink and watercolor. Cards provide summaries of each portion of *Titi, Nunu, and Klembolo* contained within the 13 plexiglass cases. A vertical drawing introduces the two-headed giant; a horizontal one shows his feet in extreme closeup on steps the boys are barely able to climb. Modjeska's placement of the larger drawings never repeats, but rather enhances the suspense or grinds the story to a stop to take in a full-page, climactic scene. "I just love how she was always creating," my friend commented as we headed to LAM's newest innovation: the Lab.

There, stations are set up for all ages to create a storybook or puppet inspired by Modjeska's fairy tale. We took one look at the puppet theater with its lush red curtain, then sat at the Martian Puppet table. Instantly engrossed, my friend was already channeling the actress' personal mythology into a replica of the aerial boat flown by a mechanical bird. As I kept an eye on Modjeska's muted tones and detailed ink lines for my sea monster with movable tentacles, I glanced at the intense primary colors and geometric 3-D projects that are becoming an installation in homage to the artists of the Self-Help Graphics exhibit. (I'll be back at the Lab for the next Paint It Black.)

Not only would a canyon and a candy be named for her, but one of Saddleback's peaks as well. Said to have had a repertoire of 256 roles, for me, the height of Modjeska's American theater career is often absent in the biographies on her various fan sites. She was the first to play Nora in the U.S. premiere of Ibsen's landmark *A Doll's House*. The performance ends with a door slam "heard 'round the world." But Modjeska was eons ahead of Nora; she was both mountain and canyon.

LBLACK@OCWEEKLY.COM

"*TITI, NUNU, AND KLEMBOLO*: HELENA MODJESKA'S FAIRY TALE BOOK"
at Laguna Art Museum, 307 Cliff Dr., Laguna Beach, (949) 494-8971, lagunaartmuseum.org. Open Fri.-Tues., 11 a.m.-5 p.m., Thurs., 11 a.m.-9 p.m. Through May 27. $5-$7.

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